

yourself. You may sense the presence of God when you recall your baptism, or at prayer, or in hearing the word of God. But few moments in life reach you as directly as does this weekly opportunity at the Lord's Supper.

What are you thinking as you receive the bread and wine, or when you return to your chair and listen to the choir and the organ, or, sometimes better, when you enjoy the silence broken only by the footfall of the communing people and the word "for you" spoken to each? What are you thinking as you join in the brief hymn to the LAMB OF GOD who "takes away the sin of the world"?

The act of communing takes but seconds, and participating in a congregational COMMUNION only a few minutes. Today, as so often before, you resolved to use the time to good advantage. Will you have done so? Admit it, some days your resolve goes as quickly as it came. You were going to concentrate on the "for you . . . for forgiveness." Instead your mind wandered, and you cannot later recall anything at all of what passed through it. Not a trace of ecstasy went with this personal moment in the meal. You were in the presence of God and, had it not been for the slight nervousness you felt going up to the front of an assembly, you might have stifled a yawn. You let some passing thing distract you. A scuff on the shoe of the minister. The smell of nicotine on a ministerial hand. The choir singing a bit flat, a jar to your musical sensibilities. A candle dripping on the new church carpet. Had you remembered to have that spot removed from the back of your coat? What will people think? Who donated those altar flowers? Will I get a raise this week?

Here you are, back in your seat. Should you feel guilty about having let the moment pass? Isn't it just human nature to have a wandering mind? You really don't believe the people who claim they can clear their heads and have pure and constant contact with God. There must be a lot of hypocrites here. Why did so little happen?

4. Reflections during Communion

The minutes of reflection during Communion do not allow time for developing a well-rounded theology. Indeed, they hardly suffice for sustaining a simple sequence of serious thought. But one can use this time, with or without some hymns or prayers, to place a few little mental levers on a few spiritual fulcrums, in order to lift them at other times, in other places. One might reflect, for example, on the feelings experienced, the forgiveness received, the presence promised, or the commitment entailed.

Experience

What am I supposed to feel? Am I *supposed* to feel? The whole idea of receiving forgiveness of sins implies recognizing how far you are from God and in how much need you stand. But what if you do not *feel* guilty or agonized?

You have to admit that different personality types will react variously. William James talked about "the sick soul" and "the healthy-minded" as psychological models. The sick soul will have no difficulty feeling in need of forgiveness. The trembling of a leaf has made hearts leap in fear from Leviticus to Luther to modern times. The whole universe seems then to be personified. It takes the form of the accusing finger of God. The victim of such sickness may simply be working out some problem left over from a bad childhood. Parents placed too many restrictions on the conscience, and adult life became nothing more than a "Do I dare?" or "Someone is watching!" Such a person hesitates to take bold action, fearing the consequences.



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When time for confession comes, such a sick soul is like a junkie let loose in a pharmacy: All the options are there, in dazzling array. If you are a sin-sick soul, as the psalmist was when he made a river of his bed because of tears, you are able to spill out whole catalogs of faults. So you examine the recesses of the heart and there find every kind of ugliness. You have not done anything worse than anyone else, but you feel worse. You know that before God the greatest faults, while they may mess up human relations more than do the sneaky little faults, violate above all the divine image. True, God forgives them as completely as others, but you still feel they demand a heroic assault.

Once upon a time you were taught to load up everything for a bimonthly crusade against sins at Communion. If you were fortunate, your church encouraged private confession. While you could and should always confess your faults against the person you offended, all faults, especially hidden ones, were faults against God. The minister became a representative person who could speak as it were for God. Ministerial words also became symbolic ways of hearing the human race reaffirm you. They personified the congregation. God was gracious, but now the human family was shown to include "gracious others."

If you did not make a private confession, every Communion service included a group opportunity for exposing your sinfulness to God through rite and ceremony. If such confessions stood the risk of turning routine—and you had to admit that the pose of the average congregation suggested that most people were pretty casual about what they were saying and doing—for you, at times at least, they were wonderful instruments for unburdening. You placed your sins on the strong shoulders of Christ, and the minister in the name of God absolved you of, or forgave,

those sins. Somehow you had to work out a logic by which you again brought them to the Lord's Table only minutes later. Since it was "for forgiveness," you were to leave sins there and walk back to the pew refreshed, with a clean slate on which to start piling up a whole new batch of sins.

Seriously, you knew that this script was not how it was supposed to work. Popular piety had things a bit wrong here. When you gathered your thoughts in an adult study class, the accent was different. There you heard a translation of the phrase *simul iustus et peccator*: You are at the same time the just person made just by the act of Christ, and the sinner kept sinful by your humanity and your acts. "At the same time" meant that when God looked at you in Christ, through Christ, because of Christ—which figuratively meant at you in your baptismal robes, identified with Christ, or here at supper with him—God did not see you as a half-safe, half-sinful being. You were not 99 and 44/100% clean and every day in every way getting better and better through positive thinking about the cross. No, God looked at you and saw Christ. Insofar as God made you just through the grace of Christ which you received in faith, you lacked nothing.

"At the same time" also meant that the God who looked at you when you stood apart from Christ saw nothing to like. This God was not impressed by your claim to have met the Lord. A bumper sticker asserting that you were born again or had received the Holy Spirit meant no more spiritually than do the annual rival claims that Notre Dame or Texas or Nebraska are number one in football. In fact, your greatest temptation—not to need God—occurred precisely in your spiritual life. Especially in our time, when *Psychology Today*, Eastern religions, and scores of Christian movements peddle techniques for meditating, you are tempted to buy into one of these mechanisms and put a claim upon God. When competitive Christian

television programs teach you how to praise God better than others, and be more pious than others, there is a danger that you will use your praise and piety to bind God, to take away the freedom of God. You will be saying, "Notice me, Lord!" All the while you are therefore not relying in faith on the gift of Jesus Christ. You are busy parading virtues, and God is saying, "Forget it! Your virtues at their best are not good enough."

The fact that you feel the need to do such parading suggests that you are a sick soul and need a remedy. You have come, then, to the right place. There is no magical transaction called confession/absolution, or confession/Lord's Supper. But in this meal you receive the gifts of Jesus Christ. You did not earn them and you did not earn a place at this banquet, but by baptism you are identified and united with Christ. As in baptism you symbolically came out from under the water, gasping for life because you had been "dead," so literally—in the Christian scheme—you did already die, and rose, with Christ. When you go to the Lord's Supper, then, as you kneel you are not bringing your adding-machine totals of the sins you want forgiven. You are bringing your whole self in need, and with the loaf and the cup you are receiving the forgiveness that assures you that your whole self is full of well-being.

You know, then, what you are supposed to feel.

William James also spoke of the religion of "the healthy-minded." He thought it was especially attractive to those who joined the Christian Science movement, liberal Protestantism, or something that was then called New Thought. Such people believed that there was an essential harmony to the universe, that all they had to do was tap into it. Mortal mind or negative thinking might interrupt the flow, but a person could realize a return to the original harmony. Such a system of faith is at odds

with the Christian drama that proclaims a disruption of that harmony. Humans created and create discord and chaos. They do not hear the purity of the angels on the morning of creation. They do not stir to the trumpets of the messengers of God. They toot their own horns and sing their own praises. Well-being is not a part of a flow. It is a divine gift that interrupts all our natural ways of expecting wholeness.

While healthy-mindedness as a system is beyond the scope of this Lord's Supper, the healthy-minded psychological style is present among Christians. The Bible and Christian history display characters who did not make a river of their beds with tears. Martin Luther may have felt threatened by a thousand devils and by a judging God who was too near, but in your healthy-mindedness you do not. You see no point in pretending. You find nothing especially attractive or Christian in those otherwise blithe people who think they please God by bowing lowest, kneeling longest, and groveling most visibly: "Look, God, I really got good at confessing!"

The healthy-minded or blithe Christian type is a personality that, fully aware of the fallenness of creation, grasps its beauty instead. After the resurrection of Christ, the first signs of a new order, a new creation, are here for affirming. This kind of Christian takes bits of sand and dye, fuses them, and produces stained glass through which you see the sun break on the sanctuary floor with a foretaste of heavenly sparkles. The New Creation Christian takes the disordered sounds of diesel engines, clanging pots, and scuffling feet and reorders them into scales and tones until you hear overtones of the music of the spheres. This Christian walks the hospital corridors aware of death but sings quiet songs because God is also at work healing. Healthy-mindedness is not positive thinking apart from God but a psychological and spiritual bearing

that finds God to be not the Judge but the One who intended and intends concord.

The blithe type lives with spiritual hazards that are as great as those brought by the grovelers. If you find yourself toward the healthy-minded part of the spectrum, you may use the Lord's Supper as a time to become especially alert to these dangers. The silences for self-examination are excellent opportunities for this. You might be riding for a fall. That is, you may be sunny about your faith because you have not yet been tested. No cloud has yet shadowed you. Wait until you find that your child is suffering from a debilitating disease. Let an economic disaster wipe out your assets. Some day someone important to you will find great fault with you and announce a breach. For all the smiles in the world, you cannot backslap your way into a new relation. Then some of the illusions with which you lived will drop.

Healthy-mindedness may imply a faulty spiritual diagnosis. You have heard the familiar statements of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls cheap grace: "I like to commit sins. God likes to forgive them. The world is admirably arranged." Or "I can sin; that's my business. God will forgive; that's the business God is in. We will keep each other busy." These are flippant translations of attitudes that color many easy lives. None of them measures the cost to God of the cross or the cost to humans of discipleship. Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it becomes nothing. But if it dies, it brings forth fruit. No one follows Jesus without taking up a cross and denying the self. Jesus knew what was in humans and searchingly stripped the disciples themselves of their claims upon God—because Jesus loved his disciples and did not want them to rule God out of their lives by their casualness.

In order to be sure that healthy-minded psychological types come to spiritual depth, the preacher in every sermon

will proclaim the law of God. In some contexts, the law of God is God's power that enables one to see what it is that care of the neighbor establishes. But in the present context, the law of God does nothing but accuse. You thought you were doing all right because you did not kill? Jesus says that if you hate, you are a murderer. You thought you were pretty healthy because you stayed married and faithful to one partner and never committed adultery? You all have committed adultery when you merely looked, or even thought, lustfully. Martin Luther liked to say that if you did not feel sinful you should reach inside your clothes and pinch yourself to see if you are still flesh and blood.

What are you supposed to feel? In some epochs and some congregations, preachers and counselors have to cool people off. Don't feel so much, they say; you are so busy enjoying your miseries that you do not even recognize that there is a Physician and that he has cured. But you, if you are healthy-minded, live in a different kind of age and place. Most sermons urge you to probe yourself more deeply. But you can build a wall against God if you start making the relation with God the basis of your own self-esteem; that will not work. The preacher's admonition to self-examination need not force you to change your personality type or your outlook on the New Creation. It only asks you to be serious. You are to see things not through illusion but as they are. The Christian faith calls you to realism about the disharmonious universe in which babies die, the innocent die, and you will die. There is a fundamental lack of fit in the way the world is now put together apart from Christ, and its misfit character will not go away this side of eternity, despite the victory of Christ.

What are you, then, supposed to feel? If not sniveling, woebegone, sub-Christian blues, you are to acquire awareness. You who are called "miserable sinners" may not feel miserable. But—to update an old illustration

from the era of trains—like occupants of an aircraft in which a time bomb is set in the baggage compartment, though you feel fine about your martini and your magazine, you *are* miserable. You are part of the misfit situation. You need rescue. You need help. At the Lord's Table it is not necessary for you to conjure up all kinds of *emotions*; you simply need to be *aware* of need and to realize the forgiveness of sins.

Forgiveness

Some weeks at the Lord's Supper you might wish to set your lever for reflection under another great burden: the concept of forgiveness. That this forgiveness of sins is "for you" is now clear by everything in the event, but what *is* forgiveness? Do we exaggerate its importance?

Jesus made much of it when he chose to forgive a person in need of physical healing, even though that meant offending the religious leaders. Give those leaders credit. They asked, with a proper sense of regard for holy things, "Who can forgive sins but God?" They were not likely to cheapen forgiveness. Paul busied himself with writing letters telling people how the forgiven should learn to live together as Jew and Gentile, male and female, bond and free. But along the way he spent many energies detailing what forgiveness meant for him and his readers. Through Christian history Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux, Martin Luther and John Calvin, and a large company of others saw forgiveness as a central image for the basic movement of a loving God to mortals.

So it is that in the late twentieth century we have inherited something we can call "the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins." Whole church bodies claim it as their possession. It is their badge and banner. With it they make their claim, "We're number one!" They use it to show what all the second bests look like, because the others own

lesser chunks of the doctrine or because they have it all wrong. In the nineteenth century, Americans paraded their Monroe Doctrine. One night a man was tarred and feathered and run out of town. A stranger came upon the miserable victim and asked him what had happened. It seems that there had been a loyalty test and a dispute about this aspect of foreign policy. What had the tarred man said or done wrong? He answered, "I didn't say I don't love the Monroe Doctrine. I do love the Monroe Doctrine. I live by the Monroe Doctrine. I would die for the Monroe Doctrine. I simply said I don't know what it is." We wonder whether the people with the tar pots and baskets of feathers knew.

You are at the Lord's Table, assured that the forgiveness of sins comes "for you." It is easy to think, "I belong to the right club. I can show God the right credentials. I am loyal to my tribe. I love the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. I live by the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. I would die for the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. But I simply do not know what it is." If so, you have difficulty reflecting on it at Holy Communion. You wish to do better.

First of all, remember that a doctrine does not save. God saves. You need not even call it a doctrine, especially in times when many people use that word to suggest that the life has already gone out of a reality. In their minds—and why play into their problems?—a doctrine is a gravestone you place over the bones of something that once lived. It is a boundary you place around something your ancestors found important. A doctrine or a dogma is an attempt by humans to define the indefinable, to step across the boundaries of mystery and speak overconfidently about the secrets of God. In a time when people do not know who they are, they use the idea of a doctrine to set boundaries. In that case, a doctrine is not a witness to their

love of truth but a mark of their sense of mutual suspicion. Since you cannot trust anyone, you have to ask whether they line up on the wrong or right side of a precisely defined doctrine. The fact that doctrines and dogmas have other, better uses is not of much help here. Let other people on other days rescue the concept of doctrine. You are a hungry person needing food, not recipe books. You seek the forgiveness of sins at the Lord's Supper.

Second, since in church you have time for clarity but not research, you might want some day to study the way the forgiveness of sins may be an obsolete badge of distinction for a church body or two. The Spirit of God works surprises these days, and the spread of divine grace is sufficiently broad that what once looked like a unique property or witness of an evangelical church now turns up on many hands. Four centuries ago, reformers of the church looked around and honestly did see some Christians turning God's gift of forgiveness into a human transaction. People were using their energies to impress God. The faithful bought or visited relics, went on pilgrimages, pursued processions, paid for masses, purchased indulgences, and did what they could to buy the favorable attention of God. They were just as often busy piling up merits to impress God, so that God dared not act unfavorably to people who were owed so much for having helped keep the universe on track. No matter how ecumenical one's spirit, those pages of history cannot be obscured. Roman Catholics, heirs of that unreformed Christianity, today point this out in very public scholarship.

Unreformed Christianity underwent reform. You will hear some people who feel called to draw boundaries for God saying that wrong teachings about forgiveness are still on those other churches' books. Maybe it would be nice if church bodies did feel obliged to retrace their steps to all

the old libraries and councils, call new councils, and bring out their erasers. But churches do not work that way. They write with far more vivid new inks over fading pages. Today it is more valuable to listen to evangelical Catholic sermons, where the message of the forgiveness of sins comes through loud and clear. *The Jerusalem Bible*, which Catholic scholars and publishers would like to see in every home, is a highly public document. Its footnoted versions stress the free gifts of the forgiveness of sins in every crucial passage. This is disappointing to some leftover anti-Catholics. What fun is the Lord's Supper, if there are fewer people to be anti- as we enjoy it? But a Christian spirit also impels you to express joy for the spread of grace. This realization, plus common agreement over the meaning of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, has built a sense of holy but not yet constant frustration among many Roman and other catholic Christians. Why do we stay apart at the Lord's Table? Who are we to build fences where the Host does not?

A third focus for reflection is this: You do not need the words *forgiveness of sins* to express the new relationship you have to God in Christ. In some ways, these words can be code words, a metaphor through which Christians can connect with many biblical themes. Through most of the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures that you call the Old Testament, repentance and forgiveness are not the prime statements. Yet the Old Testament is the church's book. God was active among his people. This God was a loving, caring, and, yes, forgiving agent. The Hebrew Scriptures busied themselves with talking about how God was shaping a people and covenanting with them out of steadfast love.

In the Gospels, Jesus is the bearer of forgiveness, but forgiveness is not the only word on his lips. Jesus calls for obedience. He asks for discipleship. Because, for many,

forgiveness symbolizes the basic trajectory of God's movement to humans, they expect to hear about nothing else. Yet Jesus does what the situation demands. When someone is ill, Jesus *may* be abrupt: "Your sins are forgiven!" But just as often he may simply heal the physical illness, and we do not hear about outcomes having to do with forgiveness. His Good Samaritan is someone who pours on oil and wine and foots the bill for the clinic, without—so far as we know—passing out tracts or preaching sermons on forgiveness.

Paul, who had persecuted the church, found it easy to feel agony over guilt. He was tortured by his need for forgiveness. So he became a proclaimer par excellence of that teaching. But, as we already noted, he spent as much time telling the forgiven how to live together, or to have holy lives, as to be forgiven. So you too do not need to have a specific code word or formula in mind when you want to realize the gift of the Lord's Supper.

When your church wrote its older books of worship and teaching, debate over forgiveness was prime. Martin Luther was of the sick-souled type, who projected his struggles from the monastery onto the movement that followed him. In the modern play *Luther* John Osborne has Luther railing against the empty heavens, as if God were remote: "God is dead." The real Luther had the opposite problem. For him the heavens were full and close, and God was too near, too threatening. A holy God might annihilate an unholy human. Divine perfection could not coexist with human imperfections. The monk tried every rule and every discipline, but still each trembling leaf caused him to cower. When, in the writings of Paul, Luther discovered the forgiveness of sins, the monk naturally chose to use it as the basic image of the loving divine movement.

Today, it is often noted, many people have a different problem. They are there with John Osborne's fictional

Luther. Their God is remote. Where Luther asked, "Is God gracious?" they ask, "Is God?" Their doubts may not lead them to verge on simple atheism. Such Christians put their problem in different ways. They will complain about the lack of meaning in their lives. Where once the simplest peasants could endure every kind of setback because God would reward them in heaven, now eternal life has become a very vague concept for them. While once God seemed to be pronouncing a perpetual benediction on their towns, so that all knew their places, now urban life seems plotless. Typical words that people use—perhaps you use—to describe the modern condition in which most of us share are alienation, brokenness, meaninglessness. We seek reconciliation, wholeness, meaning.

Say words like reconciliation, wholeness, and meaning, and you come very close to the center of Christian witness. Jesus Christ reconciles God to humans, and humans to each other. Wholeness virtually serves as a synonym for salvation, for well-being under God. Jesus Christ the risen one brings meaning because he is the first sign of the New Creation, the new order of being. It is hard to see why anyone should feel guilty about using words like these to express the experience of grace in the Lord's Supper. Christ the physician offers the gift of a cure for what ails us. If he and we have varying names for the disease—and thus, in a way, subtly different diseases—we shall welcome marvelously varied remedies. Forgiveness of sins, then, is a blanket term for the whole relationship that Jesus effects and which is "for you" in the Lord's Supper when grasped by faith.

While writing these pages, I had occasion to consult Edmund Schlink's *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* to see what he and they had to say on this subject. Under "Forgiveness" the index said, "see Gospel; Justification; Lord's Supper; Word of God." Under three of those four categories "forgiveness" did not appear at all; the book

treats it as a synonym for gospel and justification! Under "Word of God," there are seven brief references to the subcategory "of forgiveness." One of these citations does suggest synonymity: "forgiveness of sins is the same as justification" in the confessional writings. And Schlink develops a thesis: "The Gospel is the word of forgiveness through which God justifies the sinner for Christ's sake"; indeed, the Gospel, say the confessions, is "the promise of forgiveness of sins and justification because of Christ."

When we introduce the "-ation" words like "justification," it is easy to clutter and confuse the mind of a modern person who wants to experience forgiveness, to realize wholeness, in the event of the Lord's Supper. How are you to think of what the code words suggest? Most important is the idea that you do not bring something with which to impress God. God shatters whatever is in your hand. The law of God accuses and annihilates you. Then God, acting through and because of Christ, creates a new you, a baptized person-in-Christ. That is what it means to be a forgiven person, to experience an act or a motion of divine forgiveness.

You can now see why this forgiveness is the core of Holy Communion. The body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper are the body and blood of Christ on the cross. The cross was for you, and so is the Supper. In the meal the cross is a present-day reality. The risen and ascended Christ is present in this form and at this event. Just as preaching, received in faith, is not mere talk about forgiveness but actually works forgiveness, so the Lord's Supper, received in faith, is not a pageant displaying the story of a forgiving God. It is God in action, effecting forgiveness, creating the new. The Large Catechism uses vivid language about the Lord's Supper not as a prescription but a remedy: "For here in the sacrament you receive from Christ's lips the forgiveness of sins, which contains and conveys God's grace and Spirit with all his

gifts, protection, defense, and power against death and the devil and all evils." Maybe you had not quite counted on having to take on "the devil and all devils," but this remedy is designed to help you do just that. And there may be a better way of conceiving what is wrong than the way of superficial diagnoses about personality types, symptoms of imbalance, Oedipal complexes, or maladjustment to the modern condition. The Lord's Supper is "the food of the soul since it nourishes and strengthens the new person." It is "a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine which aids and quickens in both soul and body. For where the soul is healed, the body has benefited also." Here is another bonus, and you do not have to join a therapeutic club in the church to share the benefit.

Forgiveness means liberation. Classically, this liberation refers to freedom from sin, death, and the devil. But it is possible to hear of this only in the context of middle-class America and not to envision all the other settings in which Christians look for liberation. In the concentration camps the Lord's Supper meant forgiveness of sins, but it also depicted a zone of human freedom into which believers hoped God would lead them again. Under governments that repress the faith, communicants cannot help but include their prayers and hopes for escape from such bondage. Late in the twentieth century in Latin America and elsewhere in what is called the Third World, Christians hungry for political and economic freedom have developed a "liberation theology." In its terms, worshipers want the Lord's Supper to be freed from the cozy bindings in which the rich celebrate it.

To the liberation theologian, many biblical motifs have come to be neglected by churches in prosperous nations. Throughout the Old Testament, the Lord of Israel is especially active among the poor and overrun. Jesus Christ clearly announces that he has also come to the oppressed and wants to work for change in their life. In that thrust,

the death of Jesus and the Lord's Supper are gifts to the poor and oppressed, who, it is said, feel less the weight of sin than they do the bondage produced by humans who exploit them. Such reasoning is understandable among people who know little freedom and have nothing earthly to look forward to under their present regimes. Secure and well-off Christians do well not to judge these brothers and sisters but to understand them when they tie together their dreams of political freedom on the one hand with their grasp of grace and liberation from sin on the other. The two are not the same thing, but freedom is contagious, and acts of imagination can help Christians everywhere share one another's aspirations and hopes that God will act.

Obsession with the code term *forgiveness of sins* has sometimes led partisans to narrow the meanings of the Lord's Table. They feel it wrong to connect eucharist or thanksgiving with the Supper because it may detract from the main theme. Yet the Great Thanksgiving is wholly preoccupied with being thankful to the loving God who not only created the world but also establishes in it a new relation with you. Others see forgiveness as in competition with the idea of communion, which some churches make central. But this is also unnecessarily cramping. Another of the Lutheran confessions connects the two: The same Lord's Supper that forgives is also "a true bond and union of Christians with Christ their head and with one another." We are, through this gift, "incorporated into the body of Christ, which is the church." Because we and others share unmerited forgiveness, we are on the same level at the Lord's Table. We have to be very careful about placing different levels where God does not, and about ruling people away whom Christ includes at his Supper.

Presence

What do we mean by the presence of Christ in this Supper?

I almost wish you had not brought this up. Perhaps if one could compute all the serious reflections that people bring to the Table, this issue of the presence would rank third. Whoever studies the history of dispute over the sacrament or listens to present-day theological debate might conclude that it is the number one issue. Why? It provides grist for intellectual debate and becomes a kind of test for people who like to sharpen their philosophical tools on things sacred. Being a historian of Christianity, I find it hard to look at the record without adding that if there is any feature of the Lord's Supper that brings out the meanest growls from partisan Christians, this is it. While the faithful people have the least difficulty with the theme, and while the New Testament offers almost no light, the subject naturally comes up in the mind of anyone who wants to be neat and inclusive in thought about the Lord's Supper.

To begin at the end, most writers on the subject say that the precise mode of Christ's presence is a mystery. Then they define mystery not as you do in a mystery story, where by the end of the book everything is clear—the butler did it; there is a conclusion, and the mystery ends. In a deeper sense mystery means rather that if you pull away one veil, another will still cover the subject; one could pull back veils for all the years that history gives and still not have exposed the subject to clear view. Emphatically, the presence of Christ is such a mystery. There can be honest and creative addresses to mystery, such as people make when they witness to the character of God, and less valid ones, of the sort one reads when people convince themselves they really have proved the existence of God or philosophically explained away the origin and presence of evil.

The special problem with the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper grows from the fact that the Scriptures are so nearly silent about it. This means that the Lord's Supper

is used to fill in many blanks. Other teachings are like barnacles attached to it, and it gets connected to other doctrines. Of course, it links with one's concept of where the risen and exalted Jesus Christ is, and whether Christ can reveal the fullness of God in earthly and finite forms. We leave those filled-in blanks and connected doctrines for other authors in other books for other days. You have the Lord's Supper on your mind.

Bring up the presence of Christ and you enter the zone where intellectuality has made its greatest mark on practice. In some churches, one gets the impression that to escape unworthiness—Paul's term for the unexamined life at the Lord's Supper—one must have a certain IQ. It would seem to be necessary for communicants to be able to mouth a precise number of memorized catechismal formulas. The church might make exception for the people in homes for the retarded, who are allowed to get by on simple affirmations of faith in Jesus Christ and a desire for the Lord's Table. But beyond them, those who merit access to Communion are those who have the prescriptions down cold. The twentieth-century church is trying to learn how to hold together two ideas: the integrity of understanding the Lord's Supper and the need not to impose barriers that the Pauline and Gospel accounts clearly do not erect. At the very least, one can learn not to attribute a mean spirit and bad faith to other Christians who are at least as concerned as you are to be faithful to the documents and the truth but who come off with a different reading.

You will never find an intellectually satisfying formula for the presence. Write that down and remember it as you read all the books, by people on your side and by others. In the end the honest writers all have to lapse back for a second to the language about mystery, where they began. Some of them succeed at representing accurately their own

church's teaching; they deserve awards from historical societies. Others ingeniously connect their personal philosophy to the teaching; they merit rewards from philosophical societies, though it is hard to picture a single philosopher likely to be impressed. My tone here might verge on the satirical and the antiintellectual. I do not intend that, since I, too, respect and even regard as necessary the idea of "loving God with all the mind" and extending this to the mode of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper. But here is a case where it is necessary to expect only small returns on expensive investments.

The Lord's Supper service has room for some ethereal images like that of the "thrice-holy" that faced Isaiah in the temple. But at the most personal point the sacrament is very physical. Just as God is revealed in the bad grammar of the well-preached word, so now you have to think in rather crass terms about another mode of the presence. The same kind of bread you will eat at home this noon is on this table. The wine here is similar to what you can have at dinner. You pass them through the same mouth. They carry the same germs. One may harden, the other turns sour, like any other bread and wine. People with bad breath and cavities receive them past droopy mustaches or elegantly tinted lips. Keep the crude images in mind, since no other ones will keep to the forefront the offense and the scandal. This food will pass through the body and be digested and excreted through natural processes. Jesus knew all about that when he pointed to bread and said "This—my body!" and when he lifted a cup and gave it with "This—my blood!" (Some scholars think that, where the Greek text uses the much fought-over word *is*, the language Jesus spoke led him simply to designate.)

You move to the Table and are given the gifts with the words "The body of Christ. . . . The blood of Christ," not "the bread of the earth, the wine of the vine." What are

you to think? Christ is somehow present in form as body, not as ghost. Christ is present in the whole church and in this congregation, in the whole event of the Lord's Supper—but also here and now. Christ is not naturally at home in your heart; there is no room for him there. But now more-than-naturally he finds room through your whole body, through faith, which also means because you hear the word promising his coming, and you cling to that promise. The promise means God recognized that in faith you accept the gift of Christ's presence, and God sees you as "one body" with all others who are in Christ, who receive this body and blood. When the minister hands over the bread or the cup, this handing over takes the same trajectory as the whole shape of God's act in Christ: Christ is handed over to evil people and for the sake of life.

One recent pondering, Robert Jensen's *Visible Words*, points to certain problems connected with two main theories about the presence. The first depends on the power of consecration—remember that ministerial sign of the cross above the bread and wine and how you thought *now* they are being changed? This approach set out to show how God, who can do anything, could make two things into one without destroying either. This is not an unintelligent approach, but it is an unnecessary one. The people who made so much of the act of consecrating were not too interested in explaining the presence. They wanted, as you do not, to carve out a role for the priesthood, to give priests a monopoly on something. Nothing worked better for this than to assert the exclusive right of the priest to a consecrating act that made two things one and yet kept them two things. Today Roman Catholicism has moved far from this concept, though it is still busy redefining evangelical priesthood.

Another way to explain the presence is to use spiritual language in order to remove distance. Yes, it says, by faith

we can see that Jesus overleaps distance and is "at the right hand of the Father." Since distances mean nothing in the spiritual realm, that right-hand position extends here to the altar where the bread and wine are. But this approach makes Christ's presence conditional on your ability to imagine him being far and near; the presence is not straightforwardly here. This understanding also seems to shrink from the idea that the divine or the human can ever be embodied. Christians cannot leap out of their bodies to be spiritually with Christ at the right hand of the Father.

A third approach is more radical than these. The body of the risen Christ is not separated from any reality. Christ has risen in the body to be where God is. God is everywhere. If the risen Christ is, according to promise, embodied where this bread and this cup are, the only miracle you need to believe in is Christ's own resurrection. God is present wherever the promises of God are in effect. These promises are embodied. God has a body where these promises connect to the man Christ Jesus, or to this event called the Lord's Supper and the bread and the cup that are at its heart.

This bread and wine are, in the eyes of God, the presence of the man Jesus. No other body and blood of Christ are to be found by means of better telescopes in farther ranges of distance above the clouds. The risen Jesus is risen to new spiritual and bodily life, so we can now be audacious about the promises and say that the bread and the cup *are* the body. But this is true only for faith. The presence is hidden. The bread does not look like his body, and it did not do so when first he made the designation and offered the promise about his embodiment in the meal. There is more to Christ than this local and temporal presence. This "more" has to do with Christ's future when the word will be preached and when the bread and wine will be enjoyed again in this event. That is why after the service today the

ministers—or anyone—can consume the leftover wine and bread. Forget about the elements then. If their power as Christ's body depended upon consecration, you would have to be deconsecrate them or save them for ongoing power. The choice you make shows how you regard this event.

Within our generation it is not likely that all Christians will come to agree on this or on any other version of the presence. Remember my first words in this connection: These efforts could do no more than draw away some veils while leaving others to surround the mystery.

Commitment

You may find it valuable to reflect on still one other feature of the Lord's Supper. What does this event have to do with my way of life?

By concentrating on what passes through your mind during the liturgy, we have sounded rather churchly and even churchy. These reflections might have the smell of incense and the glow of candles about them, and thus they lose contact with the surrounding world. Yet you may spend all but a couple of your 168 weekly hours outside the sanctuary. Debates about catechisms and dogma will almost never come up there. The test of this Lord's Supper and its workings will be in the lives of communicants.

In the oldest words we have about this meal, in First Corinthians, Paul concerned himself with connecting Communion practices with the lives of the participants. Many of them lived in open scandal. That had to stop. Others made a noisy orgy out of the eucharist itself. Paul drew the congregation up short with questions: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16-17). That word *participation* is an urgent link between the

liturgy and Jesus Christ and then between Jesus Christ and all the rest of life. An exchange is going on here; in fact, behind the Greek word translated "participation" stands the word *exchange*. In a sense, Jesus Christ, the son of God and divine Savior, exchanges roles when he takes on flesh, humbles himself, gives himself in this bread and wine, and suffers death. And for that reason you undergo an exchange and get to share in the divine gifts and life.

No one should walk away from the Lord's Supper unchanged. It is good to use the visibility of Communion and its bodily actions as an occasional means to reflect on personal commitment. You may have heard some experts advise that congregations be kept busy singing hymns during Communion so that they will not accidentally glance up and see who else is at the Lord's Table. A good-looking person of one sex may distract an observer of the other. The sight of someone you cannot stand could disturb you. (In which case, why were you not reconciled before this hour? Seeing the person is a reminder of ongoing work for you!) We could turn this around: Seeing and being seen is a very useful exercise, since bodily movement to the Table is an announcement of intentions. Not "Look at me, folks, how pious I am for being here!" The day when attending church gave you status is long past. Instead "Look at me, folks, as I look at you. We are sinners, but we are participants in the body and blood of Jesus Christ. We get to see what prophets and kings wanted to see but could not. We are part of the New Creation. Our bodies are on the line. We are committed."

A congregation is a gathering of people who bear one another's burdens. They are people who can support one another in illness and weakness, encourage one another when a task is heavy, speak a word of serious concern when they detect a lapse, and rejoice together in victories. Bodily presence at the Lord's Supper is not to be shunned

but celebrated. Jesus Christ is here in a bodily presence with the bread. Why should you lower your eyes? Jesus Christ is here also as a bodily presence in you and your fellow members, who are to be Christs to each other. You should not lower your eyes. Look up.

And as you look up, you see that the last communicants are leaving the Table. One or another of these reflections took control of your mind. You have to scoop up a hymnal, a worship folder, and some leftover thoughts, since the service will come rather abruptly to its end.

5. "In the Morning . . ."

The Communion being ended, and your reflections too, the ministers clear the table and replace the cup and plate while you join in singing the CANTICLE, a short hymn of thanks. The minister offers a PRAYER, pronounces a BLESSING on you and all the people, and says, "Go in peace. Serve the Lord." (This used to be: "*Ita missa est*"—"the mass is ended; go in peace." Hence the term *mass*.) So you go in peace. You glance at your watch, wondering whether the service was over-long, given the rather large communing congregation today. A secular thought crowds in. Has the roast burned? I've got to catch Harry and Marge to see about our get-together on Friday. Will that weak battery start the motor? Such thoughts were not completely out of mind during the service. They are with you yet. But God is present among people whose minds wander, whose attentions stray, whose staying-power is short. He is present in a sanctuary that never quite leaves behind its world. God is also present in a world that should become a sanctuary. His peace goes with you into that world.

You greet the ministers at the door, as you did back when they passed the peace of Christ, you chat with some friends, the car does start, the roast is only slightly burned, and most of the day is still ahead of you. By evening you will have passed through some of the usual cycles of boredom, drift, anger, and frustration. You hollered at the children. You grumbled about having to go to work tomorrow. You bet wrong on that choice of an evening

yourself. You may sense the presence of God when you recall your baptism, or at prayer, or in hearing the word of God. But few moments in life reach you as directly as does this weekly opportunity at the Lord's Supper.

What are you thinking as you receive the bread and wine, or when you return to your chair and listen to the choir and the organ, or, sometimes better, when you enjoy the silence broken only by the footfall of the communing people and the word "for you" spoken to each? What are you thinking as you join in the brief hymn to the LAMB OF GOD who "takes away the sin of the world"?

The act of communing takes but seconds, and participating in a congregational COMMUNION only a few minutes. Today, as so often before, you resolved to use the time to good advantage. Will you have done so? Admit it, some days your resolve goes as quickly as it came. You were going to concentrate on the "for you . . . for forgiveness." Instead your mind wandered, and you cannot later recall anything at all of what passed through it. Not a trace of ecstasy went with this personal moment in the meal. You were in the presence of God and, had it not been for the slight nervousness you felt going up to the front of an assembly, you might have stifled a yawn. You let some passing thing distract you. A scuff on the shoe of the minister. The smell of nicotine on a ministerial hand. The choir singing a bit flat, a jar to your musical sensibilities. A candle dripping on the new church carpet. Had you remembered to have that spot removed from the back of your coat? What will people think? Who donated those altar flowers? Will I get a raise this week?

Here you are, back in your seat. Should you feel guilty about having let the moment pass? Isn't it just human nature to have a wandering mind? You really don't believe the people who claim they can clear their heads and have pure and constant contact with God. There must be a lot of hypocrites here. Why did so little happen?

4. Reflections during Communion

The minutes of reflection during Communion do not allow time for developing a well-rounded theology. Indeed, they hardly suffice for sustaining a simple sequence of serious thought. But one can use this time, with or without some hymns or prayers, to place a few little mental levers on a few spiritual fulcrums, in order to lift them at other times, in other places. One might reflect, for example, on the feelings experienced, the forgiveness received, the presence promised, or the commitment entailed.

Experience

What am I supposed to feel? Am I *supposed* to feel? The whole idea of receiving forgiveness of sins implies recognizing how far you are from God and in how much need you stand. But what if you do not *feel* guilty or agonized?

You have to admit that different personality types will react variously. William James talked about "the sick soul" and "the healthy-minded" as psychological models. The sick soul will have no difficulty feeling in need of forgiveness. The trembling of a leaf has made hearts leap in fear from Leviticus to Luther to modern times. The whole universe seems then to be personified. It takes the form of the accusing finger of God. The victim of such sickness may simply be working out some problem left over from a bad childhood. Parents placed too many restrictions on the conscience, and adult life became nothing more than a "Do I dare?" or "Someone is watching!" Such a person hesitates to take bold action, fearing the consequences.



When time for confession comes, such a sick soul is like a junkie let loose in a pharmacy: All the options are there, in dazzling array. If you are a sin-sick soul, as the psalmist was when he made a river of his bed because of tears, you are able to spill out whole catalogs of faults. So you examine the recesses of the heart and there find every kind of ugliness. You have not done anything worse than anyone else, but you feel worse. You know that before God the greatest faults, while they may mess up human relations more than do the sneaky little faults, violate above all the divine image. True, God forgives them as completely as others, but you still feel they demand a heroic assault.

Once upon a time you were taught to load up everything for a bimonthly crusade against sins at Communion. If you were fortunate, your church encouraged private confession. While you could and should always confess your faults against the person you offended, all faults, especially hidden ones, were faults against God. The minister became a representative person who could speak as it were for God. Ministerial words also became symbolic ways of hearing the human race reaffirm you. They personified the congregation. God was gracious, but now the human family was shown to include "gracious others."

If you did not make a private confession, every Communion service included a group opportunity for exposing your sinfulness to God through rite and ceremony. If such confessions stood the risk of turning routine—and you had to admit that the pose of the average congregation suggested that most people were pretty casual about what they were saying and doing—for you, at times at least, they were wonderful instruments for unburdening. You placed your sins on the strong shoulders of Christ, and the minister in the name of God absolved you of, or forgave,

those sins. Somehow you had to work out a logic by which you again brought them to the Lord's Table only minutes later. Since it was "for forgiveness," you were to leave sins there and walk back to the pew refreshed, with a clean slate on which to start piling up a whole new batch of sins.

Seriously, you knew that this script was not how it was supposed to work. Popular piety had things a bit wrong here. When you gathered your thoughts in an adult study class, the accent was different. There you heard a translation of the phrase *simul iustus et peccator*: You are at the same time the just person made just by the act of Christ, and the sinner kept sinful by your humanity and your acts. "At the same time" meant that when God looked at you in Christ, through Christ, because of Christ—which figuratively meant at you in your baptismal robes, identified with Christ, or here at supper with him—God did not see you as a half-safe, half-sinful being. You were not 99 and 44/100% clean and every day in every way getting better and better through positive thinking about the cross. No, God looked at you and saw Christ. Insofar as God made you just through the grace of Christ which you received in faith, you lacked nothing.

"At the same time" also meant that the God who looked at you when you stood apart from Christ saw nothing to like. This God was not impressed by your claim to have met the Lord. A bumper sticker asserting that you were born again or had received the Holy Spirit meant no more spiritually than do the annual rival claims that Notre Dame or Texas or Nebraska are number one in football. In fact, your greatest temptation—not to need God—occurred precisely in your spiritual life. Especially in our time, when *Psychology Today*, Eastern religions, and scores of Christian movements peddle techniques for meditating, you are tempted to buy into one of these mechanisms and put a claim upon God. When competitive Christian

television programs teach you how to praise God better than others, and be more pious than others, there is a danger that you will use your praise and piety to bind God, to take away the freedom of God. You will be saying, "Notice me, Lord!" All the while you are therefore not relying in faith on the gift of Jesus Christ. You are busy parading virtues, and God is saying, "Forget it! Your virtues at their best are not good enough."

The fact that you feel the need to do such parading suggests that you are a sick soul and need a remedy. You have come, then, to the right place. There is no magical transaction called confession/absolution, or confession/Lord's Supper. But in this meal you receive the gifts of Jesus Christ. You did not earn them and you did not earn a place at this banquet, but by baptism you are identified and united with Christ. As in baptism you symbolically came out from under the water, gasping for life because you had been "dead," so literally—in the Christian scheme—you did already die, and rose, with Christ. When you go to the Lord's Supper, then, as you kneel you are not bringing your adding-machine totals of the sins you want forgiven. You are bringing your whole self in need, and with the loaf and the cup you are receiving the forgiveness that assures you that your whole self is full of well-being.

You know, then, what you are supposed to feel.

William James also spoke of the religion of "the healthy-minded." He thought it was especially attractive to those who joined the Christian Science movement, liberal Protestantism, or something that was then called New Thought. Such people believed that there was an essential harmony to the universe, that all they had to do was tap into it. Mortal mind or negative thinking might interrupt the flow, but a person could realize a return to the original harmony. Such a system of faith is at odds

with the Christian drama that proclaims a disruption of that harmony. Humans created and create discord and chaos. They do not hear the purity of the angels on the morning of creation. They do not stir to the trumpets of the messengers of God. They toot their own horns and sing their own praises. Well-being is not a part of a flow. It is a divine gift that interrupts all our natural ways of expecting wholeness.

While healthy-mindedness as a system is beyond the scope of this Lord's Supper, the healthy-minded psychological style is present among Christians. The Bible and Christian history display characters who did not make a river of their beds with tears. Martin Luther may have felt threatened by a thousand devils and by a judging God who was too near, but in your healthy-mindedness you do not. You see no point in pretending. You find nothing especially attractive or Christian in those otherwise blithe people who think they please God by bowing lowest, kneeling longest, and groveling most visibly: "Look, God, I really got good at confessing!"

The healthy-minded or blithe Christian type is a personality that, fully aware of the fallenness of creation, grasps its beauty instead. After the resurrection of Christ, the first signs of a new order, a new creation, are here for affirming. This kind of Christian takes bits of sand and dye, fuses them, and produces stained glass through which you see the sun break on the sanctuary floor with a foretaste of heavenly sparkles. The New Creation Christian takes the disordered sounds of diesel engines, clanging pots, and scuffling feet and reorders them into scales and tones until you hear overtones of the music of the spheres. This Christian walks the hospital corridors aware of death but sings quiet songs because God is also at work healing. Healthy-mindedness is not positive thinking apart from God but a psychological and spiritual bearing

that finds God to be not the Judge but the One who intended and intends concord.

The blithe type lives with spiritual hazards that are as great as those brought by the grovelers. If you find yourself toward the healthy-minded part of the spectrum, you may use the Lord's Supper as a time to become especially alert to these dangers. The silences for self-examination are excellent opportunities for this. You might be riding for a fall. That is, you may be sunny about your faith because you have not yet been tested. No cloud has yet shadowed you. Wait until you find that your child is suffering from a debilitating disease. Let an economic disaster wipe out your assets. Some day someone important to you will find great fault with you and announce a breach. For all the smiles in the world, you cannot backslap your way into a new relation. Then some of the illusions with which you lived will drop.

Healthy-mindedness may imply a faulty spiritual diagnosis. You have heard the familiar statements of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls cheap grace: "I like to commit sins. God likes to forgive them. The world is admirably arranged." Or "I can sin; that's my business. God will forgive; that's the business God is in. We will keep each other busy." These are flippant translations of attitudes that color many easy lives. None of them measures the cost to God of the cross or the cost to humans of discipleship. Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it becomes nothing. But if it dies, it brings forth fruit. No one follows Jesus without taking up a cross and denying the self. Jesus knew what was in humans and searchingly stripped the disciples themselves of their claims upon God—because Jesus loved his disciples and did not want them to rule God out of their lives by their casualness.

In order to be sure that healthy-minded psychological types come to spiritual depth, the preacher in every sermon

will proclaim the law of God. In some contexts, the law of God is God's power that enables one to see what it is that care of the neighbor establishes. But in the present context, the law of God does nothing but accuse. You thought you were doing all right because you did not kill? Jesus says that if you hate, you are a murderer. You thought you were pretty healthy because you stayed married and faithful to one partner and never committed adultery? You all have committed adultery when you merely looked, or even thought, lustfully. Martin Luther liked to say that if you did not feel sinful you should reach inside your clothes and pinch yourself to see if you are still flesh and blood.

What are you supposed to feel? In some epochs and some congregations, preachers and counselors have to cool people off. Don't feel so much, they say; you are so busy enjoying your miseries that you do not even recognize that there is a Physician and that he has cured. But you, if you are healthy-minded, live in a different kind of age and place. Most sermons urge you to probe yourself more deeply. But you can build a wall against God if you start making the relation with God the basis of your own self-esteem; that will not work. The preacher's admonition to self-examination need not force you to change your personality type or your outlook on the New Creation. It only asks you to be serious. You are to see things not through illusion but as they are. The Christian faith calls you to realism about the disharmonious universe in which babies die, the innocent die, and you will die. There is a fundamental lack of fit in the way the world is now put together apart from Christ, and its misfit character will not go away this side of eternity, despite the victory of Christ.

What are you, then, supposed to feel? If not sniveling, weebegone, sub-Christian blues, you are to acquire awareness. You who are called "miserable sinners" may not feel miserable. But—to update an old illustration

from the era of trains—like occupants of an aircraft in which a time bomb is set in the baggage compartment, though you feel fine about your martini and your magazine, you *are* miserable. You are part of the misfit situation. You need rescue. You need help. At the Lord's Table it is not necessary for you to conjure up all kinds of *emotions*; you simply need to be *aware* of need and to realize the forgiveness of sins.

Forgiveness

Some weeks at the Lord's Supper you might wish to set your lever for reflection under another great burden: the concept of forgiveness. That this forgiveness of sins is "for you" is now clear by everything in the event, but what is forgiveness? Do we exaggerate its importance?

Jesus made much of it when he chose to forgive a person in need of physical healing, even though that meant offending the religious leaders. Give those leaders credit. They asked, with a proper sense of regard for holy things, "Who can forgive sins but God?" They were not likely to cheapen forgiveness. Paul busied himself with writing letters telling people how the forgiven should learn to live together as Jew and Gentile, male and female, bond and free. But along the way he spent many energies detailing what forgiveness meant for him and his readers. Through Christian history Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux, Martin Luther and John Calvin, and a large company of others saw forgiveness as a central image for the basic movement of a loving God to mortals.

So it is that in the late twentieth century we have inherited something we can call "the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins." Whole church bodies claim it as their possession. It is their badge and banner. With it they make their claim, "We're number one!" They use it to show what all the second bests look like, because the others own

lesser chunks of the doctrine or because they have it all wrong. In the nineteenth century, Americans paraded their Monroe Doctrine. One night a man was tarred and feathered and run out of town. A stranger came upon the miserable victim and asked him what had happened. It seems that there had been a loyalty test and a dispute about this aspect of foreign policy. What had the tarred man said or done wrong? He answered, "I didn't say I don't love the Monroe Doctrine. I do love the Monroe Doctrine. I live by the Monroe Doctrine. I would die for the Monroe Doctrine. I simply said I don't know what it is." We wonder whether the people with the tar pots and baskets of feathers knew.

You are at the Lord's Table, assured that the forgiveness of sins comes "for you." It is easy to think, "I belong to the right club. I can show God the right credentials. I am loyal to my tribe. I love the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. I live by the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. I would die for the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. But I simply do not know what it is." If so, you have difficulty reflecting on it at Holy Communion. You wish to do better.

First of all, remember that a doctrine does not save. God saves. You need not even call it a doctrine, especially in times when many people use that word to suggest that the life has already gone out of a reality. In their minds—and why play into their problems?—a doctrine is a gravestone you place over the bones of something that once lived. It is a boundary you place around something your ancestors found important. A doctrine or a dogma is an attempt by humans to define the indefinable, to step across the boundaries of mystery and speak overconfidently about the secrets of God. In a time when people do not know who they are, they use the idea of a doctrine to set boundaries. In that case, a doctrine is not a witness to their

love of truth but a mark of their sense of mutual suspicion. Since you cannot trust anyone, you have to ask whether they line up on the wrong or right side of a precisely defined doctrine. The fact that doctrines and dogmas have other, better uses is not of much help here. Let other people on other days rescue the concept of doctrine. You are a hungry person needing food, not recipe books. You seek the forgiveness of sins at the Lord's Supper.

Second, since in church you have time for clarity but not research, you might want some day to study the way the forgiveness of sins may be an obsolete badge of distinction for a church body or two. The Spirit of God works surprises these days, and the spread of divine grace is sufficiently broad that what once looked like a unique property or witness of an evangelical church now turns up on many hands. Four centuries ago, reformers of the church looked around and honestly did see some Christians turning God's gift of forgiveness into a human transaction. People were using their energies to impress God. The faithful bought or visited relics, went on pilgrimages, pursued processions, paid for masses, purchased indulgences, and did what they could to buy the favorable attention of God. They were just as often busy piling up merits to impress God, so that God dared not act unfavorably to people who were owed so much for having helped keep the universe on track. No matter how ecumenical one's spirit, those pages of history cannot be obscured. Roman Catholics, heirs of that unreformed Christianity, today point this out in very public scholarship.

Unreformed Christianity underwent reform. You will hear some people who feel called to draw boundaries for God saying that wrong teachings about forgiveness are still on those other churches' books. Maybe it would be nice if church bodies did feel obliged to retrace their steps to all

the old libraries and councils, call new councils, and bring out their erasers. But churches do not work that way. They write with far more vivid new inks over fading pages. Today it is more valuable to listen to evangelical Catholic sermons, where the message of the forgiveness of sins comes through loud and clear. *The Jerusalem Bible*, which Catholic scholars and publishers would like to see in every home, is a highly public document. Its footnoted versions stress the free gifts of the forgiveness of sins in every crucial passage. This is disappointing to some leftover anti-Catholics. What fun is the Lord's Supper, if there are fewer people to be anti- as we enjoy it? But a Christian spirit also impels you to express joy for the spread of grace. This realization, plus common agreement over the meaning of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, has built a sense of holy but not yet constant frustration among many Roman and other catholic Christians. Why do we stay apart at the Lord's Table? Who are we to build fences where the Host does not?

A third focus for reflection is this: You do not need the words *forgiveness of sins* to express the new relationship you have to God in Christ. In some ways, these words can be code words, a metaphor through which Christians can connect with many biblical themes. Through most of the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures that you call the Old Testament, repentance and forgiveness are not the prime statements. Yet the Old Testament is the church's book. God was active among his people. This God was a loving, caring, and, yes, forgiving agent. The Hebrew Scriptures busied themselves with talking about how God was shaping a people and covenanting with them out of steadfast love.

In the Gospels, Jesus is the bearer of forgiveness, but forgiveness is not the only word on his lips. Jesus calls for obedience. He asks for discipleship. Because, for many,

forgiveness symbolizes the basic trajectory of God's movement to humans, they expect to hear about nothing else. Yet Jesus does what the situation demands. When someone is ill, Jesus *may* be abrupt: "Your sins are forgiven!" But just as often he may simply heal the physical illness, and we do not hear about outcomes having to do with forgiveness. His Good Samaritan is someone who pours on oil and wine and foots the bill for the clinic, without—so far as we know—passing out tracts or preaching sermons on forgiveness.

Paul, who had persecuted the church, found it easy to feel agony over guilt. He was tortured by his need for forgiveness. So he became a proclaimer par excellence of that teaching. But, as we already noted, he spent as much time telling the forgiven how to live together, or to have holy lives, as to be forgiven. So you too do not need to have a specific code word or formula in mind when you want to realize the gift of the Lord's Supper.

When your church wrote its older books of worship and teaching, debate over forgiveness was prime. Martin Luther was of the sick-souled type, who projected his struggles from the monastery onto the movement that followed him. In the modern play *Luther* John Osborne has Luther railing against the empty heavens, as if God were remote: "God is dead." The real Luther had the opposite problem. For him the heavens were full and close, and God was too near, too threatening. A holy God might annihilate an unholy human. Divine perfection could not coexist with human imperfections. The monk tried every rule and every discipline, but still each trembling leaf caused him to cower. When, in the writings of Paul, Luther discovered the forgiveness of sins, the monk naturally chose to use it as the basic image of the loving divine movement.

Today, it is often noted, many people have a different problem. They are there with John Osborne's fictional

Luther. Their God is remote. Where Luther asked, "Is God gracious?" they ask, "Is God?" Their doubts may not lead them to verge on simple atheism. Such Christians put their problem in different ways. They will complain about the lack of meaning in their lives. Where once the simplest peasants could endure every kind of setback because God would reward them in heaven, now eternal life has become a very vague concept for them. While once God seemed to be pronouncing a perpetual benediction on their towns, so that all knew their places, now urban life seems plotless. Typical words that people use—perhaps you use—to describe the modern condition in which most of us share are alienation, brokenness, meaninglessness. We seek reconciliation, wholeness, meaning.

Say words like reconciliation, wholeness, and meaning, and you come very close to the center of Christian witness. Jesus Christ reconciles God to humans, and humans to each other. Wholeness virtually serves as a synonym for salvation, for well-being under God. Jesus Christ the risen one brings meaning because he is the first sign of the New Creation, the new order of being. It is hard to see why anyone should feel guilty about using words like these to express the experience of grace in the Lord's Supper. Christ the physician offers the gift of a cure for what ails us. If he and we have varying names for the disease—and thus, in a way, subtly different diseases—we shall welcome marvelously varied remedies. Forgiveness of sins, then, is a blanket term for the whole relationship that Jesus effects and which is "for you" in the Lord's Supper when grasped by faith.

While writing these pages, I had occasion to consult Edmund Schlink's *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* to see what he and they had to say on this subject. Under "Forgiveness" the index said, "see Gospel; Justification; Lord's Supper; Word of God." Under three of those four categories "forgiveness" did not appear at all; the book

treats it as a synonym for gospel and justification! Under "Word of God," there are seven brief references to the subcategory "of forgiveness." One of these citations does suggest synonymy: "forgiveness of sins is the same as justification" in the confessional writings. And Schlink develops a thesis: "The Gospel is the word of forgiveness through which God justifies the sinner for Christ's sake"; indeed, the Gospel, say the confessions, is "the promise of forgiveness of sins and justification because of Christ."

When we introduce the "-ation" words like "justification," it is easy to clutter and confuse the mind of a modern person who wants to experience forgiveness, to realize wholeness, in the event of the Lord's Supper. How are you to think of what the code words suggest? Most important is the idea that you do not bring something with which to impress God. God shatters whatever is in your hand. The law of God accuses and annihilates you. Then God, acting through and because of Christ, creates a new you, a baptized person-in-Christ. That is what it means to be a forgiven person, to experience an act or a motion of divine forgiveness.

You can now see why this forgiveness is the core of Holy Communion. The body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper are the body and blood of Christ on the cross. The cross was for you, and so is the Supper. In the meal the cross is a present-day reality. The risen and ascended Christ is present in this form and at this event. Just as preaching, received in faith, is not mere talk about forgiveness but actually works forgiveness, so the Lord's Supper, received in faith, is not a pageant displaying the story of a forgiving God. It is God in action, effecting forgiveness, creating the new. The Large Catechism uses vivid language about the Lord's Supper not as a prescription but a remedy: "For here in the sacrament you receive from Christ's lips the forgiveness of sins, which contains and conveys God's grace and Spirit with all his

gifts, protection, defense, and power against death and the devil and all evils." Maybe you had not quite counted on having to take on "the devil and all devils," but this remedy is designed to help you do just that. And there may be a better way of conceiving what is wrong than the way of superficial diagnoses about personality types, symptoms of imbalance, Oedipal complexes, or maladjustment to the modern condition. The Lord's Supper is "the food of the soul since it nourishes and strengthens the new person." It is "a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine which aids and quickens in both soul and body. For where the soul is healed, the body has benefited also." Here is another bonus, and you do not have to join a therapeutic club in the church to share the benefit.

Forgiveness means liberation. Classically, this liberation refers to freedom from sin, death, and the devil. But it is possible to hear of this only in the context of middle-class America and not to envision all the other settings in which Christians look for liberation. In the concentration camps the Lord's Supper meant forgiveness of sins, but it also depicted a zone of human freedom into which believers hoped God would lead them again. Under governments that repress the faith, communicants cannot help but include their prayers and hopes for escape from such bondage. Late in the twentieth century in Latin America and elsewhere in what is called the Third World, Christians hungry for political and economic freedom have developed a "liberation theology." In its terms, worshipers want the Lord's Supper to be freed from the cozy bindings in which the rich celebrate it.

To the liberation theologian, many biblical motifs have come to be neglected by churches in prosperous nations. Throughout the Old Testament, the Lord of Israel is especially active among the poor and overrun. Jesus Christ clearly announces that he has also come to the oppressed and wants to work for change in their life. In that thrust,

the death of Jesus and the Lord's Supper are gifts to the poor and oppressed, who, it is said, feel less the weight of sin than they do the bondage produced by humans who exploit them. Such reasoning is understandable among people who know little freedom and have nothing earthly to look forward to under their present regimes. Secure and well-off Christians do well not to judge these brothers and sisters but to understand them when they tie together their dreams of political freedom on the one hand with their grasp of grace and liberation from sin on the other. The two are not the same thing, but freedom is contagious, and acts of imagination can help Christians everywhere share one another's aspirations and hopes that God will act.

Obsession with the code term *forgiveness of sins* has sometimes led partisans to narrow the meanings of the Lord's Table. They feel it wrong to connect eucharist or thanksgiving with the Supper because it may detract from the main theme. Yet the Great Thanksgiving is wholly preoccupied with being thankful to the loving God who not only created the world but also establishes in it a new relation with you. Others see forgiveness as in competition with the idea of communion, which some churches make central. But this is also unnecessarily cramping. Another of the Lutheran confessions connects the two: The same Lord's Supper that forgives is also "a true bond and union of Christians with Christ their head and with one another." We are, through this gift, "incorporated into the body of Christ, which is the church." Because we and others share unmerited forgiveness, we are on the same level at the Lord's Table. We have to be very careful about placing different levels where God does not, and about ruling people away whom Christ includes at his Supper.

Presence

What do we mean by the presence of Christ in this Supper?

I almost wish you had not brought this up. Perhaps if one could compute all the serious reflections that people bring to the Table, this issue of the presence would rank third. Whoever studies the history of dispute over the sacrament or listens to present-day theological debate might conclude that it is the number one issue. Why? It provides grist for intellectual debate and becomes a kind of test for people who like to sharpen their philosophical tools on things sacred. Being a historian of Christianity, I find it hard to look at the record without adding that if there is any feature of the Lord's Supper that brings out the meanest growls from partisan Christians, this is it. While the faithful people have the least difficulty with the theme, and while the New Testament offers almost no light, the subject naturally comes up in the mind of anyone who wants to be neat and inclusive in thought about the Lord's Supper.

To begin at the end, most writers on the subject say that the precise mode of Christ's presence is a mystery. Then they define mystery not as you do in a mystery story, where by the end of the book everything is clear—the butler did it; there is a conclusion, and the mystery ends. In a deeper sense mystery means rather that if you pull away one veil, another will still cover the subject; one could pull back veils for all the years that history gives and still not have exposed the subject to clear view. Emphatically, the presence of Christ is such a mystery. There can be honest and creative addresses to mystery, such as people make when they witness to the character of God, and less valid ones, of the sort one reads when people convince themselves they really have proved the existence of God or philosophically explained away the origin and presence of evil.

The special problem with the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper grows from the fact that the Scriptures are so nearly silent about it. This means that the Lord's Supper

is used to fill in many blanks. Other teachings are like barnacles attached to it, and it gets connected to other doctrines. Of course, it links with one's concept of where the risen and exalted Jesus Christ is, and whether Christ can reveal the fullness of God in earthly and finite forms. We leave those filled-in blanks and connected doctrines for other authors in other books for other days. You have the Lord's Supper on your mind.

Bring up the presence of Christ and you enter the zone where intellectuality has made its greatest mark on practice. In some churches, one gets the impression that to escape unworthiness—Paul's term for the unexamined life at the Lord's Supper—one must have a certain IQ. It would seem to be necessary for communicants to be able to mouth a precise number of memorized catechismal formulas. The church might make exception for the people in homes for the retarded, who are allowed to get by on simple affirmations of faith in Jesus Christ and a desire for the Lord's Table. But beyond them, those who merit access to Communion are those who have the prescriptions down cold. The twentieth-century church is trying to learn how to hold together two ideas: the integrity of understanding the Lord's Supper and the need not to impose barriers that the Pauline and Gospel accounts clearly do not erect. At the very least, one can learn not to attribute a mean spirit and bad faith to other Christians who are at least as concerned as you are to be faithful to the documents and the truth but who come off with a different reading.

You will never find an intellectually satisfying formula for the presence. Write that down and remember it as you read all the books, by people on your side and by others. In the end the honest writers all have to lapse back for a second to the language about mystery, where they began. Some of them succeed at representing accurately their own

church's teaching; they deserve awards from historical societies. Others ingeniously connect their personal philosophy to the teaching; they merit rewards from philosophical societies, though it is hard to picture a single philosopher likely to be impressed. My tone here might verge on the satirical and the antiintellectual. I do not intend that, since I, too, respect and even regard as necessary the idea of "loving God with all the mind" and extending this to the mode of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper. But here is a case where it is necessary to expect only small returns on expensive investments.

The Lord's Supper service has room for some ethereal images like that of the "thrice-holy" that faced Isaiah in the temple. But at the most personal point the sacrament is very physical. Just as God is revealed in the bad grammar of the well-preached word, so now you have to think in rather crass terms about another mode of the presence. The same kind of bread you will eat at home this noon is on this table. The wine here is similar to what you can have at dinner. You pass them through the same mouth. They carry the same germs. One may harden, the other turns sour, like any other bread and wine. People with bad breath and cavities receive them past droopy mustaches or elegantly tinted lips. Keep the crude images in mind, since no other ones will keep to the forefront the offense and the scandal. This food will pass through the body and be digested and excreted through natural processes. Jesus knew all about that when he pointed to bread and said "This—my body!" and when he lifted a cup and gave it with "This—my blood!" (Some scholars think that, where the Greek text uses the much fought-over word *is*, the language Jesus spoke led him simply to designate.)

You move to the Table and are given the gifts with the words "The body of Christ. . . . The blood of Christ," not "the bread of the earth, the wine of the vine." What are

you to think? Christ is somehow present in form as body, not as ghost. Christ is present in the whole church and in this congregation, in the whole event of the Lord's Supper—but also here and now. Christ is not naturally at home in your heart; there is no room for him there. But now more-than-naturally he finds room through your whole body, through faith, which also means because you hear the word promising his coming, and you cling to that promise. The promise means God recognized that in faith you accept the gift of Christ's presence, and God sees you as "one body" with all others who are in Christ, who receive this body and blood. When the minister hands over the bread or the cup, this handing over takes the same trajectory as the whole shape of God's act in Christ: Christ is handed over to evil people and for the sake of life.

One recent pondering, Robert Jenson's *Visible Words*, points to certain problems connected with two main theories about the presence. The first depends on the power of consecration—remember that ministerial sign of the cross above the bread and wine and how you thought *now* they are being changed? This approach set out to show how God, who can do anything, could make two things into one without destroying either. This is not an unintelligent approach, but it is an unnecessary one. The people who made so much of the act of consecrating were not too interested in explaining the presence. They wanted, as you do not, to carve out a role for the priesthood, to give priests a monopoly on something. Nothing worked better for this than to assert the exclusive right of the priest to a consecrating act that made two things one and yet kept them two things. Today Roman Catholicism has moved far from this concept, though it is still busy redefining evangelical priesthood.

Another way to explain the presence is to use spiritual language in order to remove distance. Yes, it says, by faith

we can see that Jesus overleaps distance and is "at the right hand of the Father." Since distances mean nothing in the spiritual realm, that right-hand position extends here to the altar where the bread and wine are. But this approach makes Christ's presence conditional on your ability to imagine him being far and near; the presence is not straightforwardly here. This understanding also seems to shrink from the idea that the divine or the human can ever be embodied. Christians cannot leap out of their bodies to be spiritually with Christ at the right hand of the Father.

A third approach is more radical than these. The body of the risen Christ is not separated from any reality. Christ has risen in the body to be where God is. God is everywhere. If the risen Christ is, according to promise, embodied where this bread and this cup are, the only miracle you need to believe in is Christ's own resurrection. God is present wherever the promises of God are in effect. These promises are embodied. God has a body where these promises connect to the man Christ Jesus, or to this event called the Lord's Supper and the bread and the cup that are at its heart.

This bread and wine are, in the eyes of God, the presence of the man Jesus. No other body and blood of Christ are to be found by means of better telescopes in farther ranges of distance above the clouds. The risen Jesus is risen to new spiritual and bodily life, so we can now be audacious about the promises and say that the bread and the cup *are* the body. But this is true only for faith. The presence is hidden. The bread does not look like his body, and it did not do so when first he made the designation and offered the promise about his embodiment in the meal. There is more to Christ than this local and temporal presence. This "more" has to do with Christ's future when the word will be preached and when the bread and wine will be enjoyed again in this event. That is why after the service today the

ministers—or anyone—can consume the leftover wine and bread. Forget about the elements then. If their power as Christ's body depended upon consecration, you would have to be deconsecrate them or save them for ongoing power. The choice you make shows how you regard this event.

Within our generation it is not likely that all Christians will come to agree on this or on any other version of the presence. Remember my first words in this connection: These efforts could do no more than draw away some veils while leaving others to surround the mystery.

Commitment

You may find it valuable to reflect on still one other feature of the Lord's Supper. What does this event have to do with my way of life?

By concentrating on what passes through your mind during the liturgy, we have sounded rather churchly and even churchy. These reflections might have the smell of incense and the glow of candles about them, and thus they lose contact with the surrounding world. Yet you may spend all but a couple of your 168 weekly hours outside the sanctuary. Debates about catechisms and dogma will almost never come up there. The test of this Lord's Supper and its workings will be in the lives of communicants.

In the oldest words we have about this meal, in First Corinthians, Paul concerned himself with connecting Communion practices with the lives of the participants. Many of them lived in open scandal. That had to stop. Others made a noisy orgy out of the eucharist itself. Paul drew the congregation up short with questions: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16-17). That word *participation* is an urgent link between the

liturgy and Jesus Christ and then between Jesus Christ and all the rest of life. An exchange is going on here; in fact, behind the Greek word translated "participation" stands the word *exchange*. In a sense, Jesus Christ, the son of God and divine Savior, exchanges roles when he takes on flesh, humbles himself, gives himself in this bread and wine, and suffers death. And for that reason you undergo an exchange and get to share in the divine gifts and life.

No one should walk away from the Lord's Supper unchanged. It is good to use the visibility of Communion and its bodily actions as an occasional means to reflect on personal commitment. You may have heard some experts advise that congregations be kept busy singing hymns during Communion so that they will not accidentally glance up and see who else is at the Lord's Table. A good-looking person of one sex may distract an observer of the other. The sight of someone you cannot stand could disturb you. (In which case, why were you not reconciled before this hour? Seeing the person is a reminder of ongoing work for you!) We could turn this around: Seeing and being seen is a very useful exercise, since bodily movement to the Table is an announcement of intentions. Not "Look at me, folks, how pious I am for being here!" The day when attending church gave you status is long past. Instead "Look at me, folks, as I look at you. We are sinners, but we are participants in the body and blood of Jesus Christ. We get to see what prophets and kings wanted to see but could not. We are part of the New Creation. Our bodies are on the line. We are committed."

A congregation is a gathering of people who bear one another's burdens. They are people who can support one another in illness and weakness, encourage one another when a task is heavy, speak a word of serious concern when they detect a lapse, and rejoice together in victories. Bodily presence at the Lord's Supper is not to be shunned

but celebrated. Jesus Christ is here in a bodily presence with the bread. Why should you lower your eyes? Jesus Christ is here also as a bodily presence in you and your fellow members, who are to be Christs to each other. You should not lower your eyes. Look up.

And as you look up, you see that the last communicants are leaving the Table. One or another of these reflections took control of your mind. You have to scoop up a hymnal, a worship folder, and some leftover thoughts, since the service will come rather abruptly to its end.

5. "In the Morning . . ."

The Communion being ended, and your reflections too, the ministers clear the table and replace the cup and plate while you join in singing the CANTICLE, a short hymn of thanks. The minister offers a PRAYER, pronounces a BLESSING on you and all the people, and says, "Go in peace. Serve the Lord." (This used to be: "*Ita missa est*"—"the mass is ended; go in peace." Hence the term *mass*.) So you go in peace. You glance at your watch, wondering whether the service was over-long, given the rather large communing congregation today. A secular thought crowds in. Has the roast burned? I've got to catch Harry and Marge to see about our get-together on Friday. Will that weak battery start the motor? Such thoughts were not completely out of mind during the service. They are with you yet. But God is present among people whose minds wander, whose attentions stray, whose staying-power is short. He is present in a sanctuary that never quite leaves behind its world. God is also present in a world that should become a sanctuary. His peace goes with you into that world.

You greet the ministers at the door, as you did back when they passed the peace of Christ, you chat with some friends, the car does start, the roast is only slightly burned, and most of the day is still ahead of you. By evening you will have passed through some of the usual cycles of boredom, drift, anger, and frustration. You hollered at the children. You grumbled about having to go to work tomorrow. You bet wrong on that choice of an evening

11

Preparation for the Church Year

The church year is a wonderful way in which we recall and celebrate the mighty acts of God. It is a reminder of God's constant activity—not only God's interventions into human history, but also his grace-filled activity among us now. Through the liturgical year we realize that we are a part of God's ongoing saving and loving activity.

For many centuries the church year calendar has shaped our worship: the readings, the sermons, the hymns and other music, the color of the paraments, and the appearance of worship space. Through a rich observance of the church year, each season and festival can make its fullest impact on the assembled congregation. The church is the grateful recipient and careful guardian of the liturgical year. Faithful observance of it is both a privilege and a responsibility. In its ministry of preparation, it is important for the altar guild to study the background and significance of the various liturgical seasons and festivals. Each day of the church year has its own unique character and message, determined by the appointed lessons for the day. Close attention to these lessons enables us to celebrate meaningfully the events in the life of our Lord and in church history.

The church year consists most basically of two parts. The

first half recalls and celebrates the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. This is the festival half of the year, and it in turn has two divisions. The Christmas cycle consists of the seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. During this time the church focuses on the prophecies and events surrounding the incarnation. The Easter cycle is composed of the seasons of Lent and Easter, from Ash Wednesday through the Day of Pentecost. During these weeks we prepare for and observe the events surrounding our Lord's passion, death, and resurrection, and his sending of the Holy Spirit.

The second half of the church year is a more ordinary, nonfestival time. It is the season after Pentecost, known as the Time of the Church. This season begins with the Holy Trinity (First Sunday after Pentecost) and concludes with the festival of Christ the King (Last Sunday after Pentecost). During these weeks, the church concentrates on Christ's public ministry—his sermons, parables, and miracles. It is a time of growth in faith, hope, and love—and thus green paraments are used as a symbol of this growth.

Principal festivals of the church year are Easter Day, the Ascension of Our Lord, the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Trinity, Christmas Day, and the Epiphany of Our Lord. Interspersed throughout the year are lesser festivals, commemorations, days commemorating events in church history, and other occasions.

Advent

Advent consists of the four weeks before Christmas. The name of this first season of the liturgical year comes from a Latin word which means "coming." Advent focuses on this "coming" in three ways: Christ coming in the past as the baby at Bethlehem, Christ coming in the present in Word and Sacraments and in the fellowship of the church, and Christ coming again in the future at the end of time. In Advent we prepare for the celebration of Christ's coming in the incarnation, but more importantly we prepare for his second coming, when he will make all things new and judge the world in righteousness.

The preferred color for Advent is blue, the color of hope. The alternate color is purple, the royal color of the coming King. Blue, however, helps make apparent the differences between Advent and Lent.

One of the themes of Advent is darkness, and it is thus appropriate to use fewer candles during these four weeks. An Advent wreath may be hung or set near the altar. The wreath is a circle with four candles, and it may be covered with greens. The candles may all be white or blue, or perhaps purple if purple paraments are used. The earlier practice of using three purple candles and one pink candle no longer reflects our calendar and lectionary. On the First Sunday in Advent, the first candle is lighted during the Psalm following the First Lesson. On the Second Sunday in Advent, the first candle is lighted prior to the service, and the second candle is lighted during the Psalm. An additional candle is thus lighted during each Sunday in Advent until all four are lighted.

Advent is a time for visual restraint and simplicity. It is appropriate to omit altar flowers during these weeks of preparation, in order to provide a marked contrast with the festivity of Christmas. When there are no flowers, vases are removed from the chancel.

Advent should not be confused with Christmas. Christmas decorations, such as a Christmas tree, should not appear during Advent.

Christmas

Christmas is the festive celebration of the Nativity of our Lord, the Word made flesh. This celebration lasts for twelve days—from Christmas Eve through Epiphany Eve.

The liturgical color for Christmas is white, symbolizing the light and purity of Christ and our great joy at his birth. White is used for the twelve days of Christmas, except for the festivals of St. Stephen (December 26) and of the Holy Innocents (December 28), when red is used in observance of their martyrdom.

Greens and wreaths may be placed in the nave and narthex,

and the chancel may be adorned with abundant poinsettias. Plants, however, are never placed on the altar itself, nor should it be obstructed by decorations. If there is sufficient room, a Christmas tree (never artificial) may be set up. The tree may be bare or decorated with white lights and chrismos. If lights are used, the tree should be made fireproof. Chrismos (taken from the word "Christ monograms") are symbols of Christ which may be made by the altar guild or other members of the parish. Decorations for Christmas should not be put up until after worship on the Fourth Sunday in Advent, because early decorating robs both Advent and Christmas of their full meaning.

Especially for Christmas Eve services, candles may be placed in windows of the nave and on the ends of pews as brilliant symbols of Christ, the Light of the world. If hand candles are distributed to worshipers, all fire safety precautions should be taken. For example, the altar guild should be certain that fire extinguishers are charged and readily accessible.

A Christmas creche may be placed near the altar, although it should not detract from the prominence of the altar itself. The figures may be carried in the entrance procession on Christmas Eve or Day and then placed in the creche. The figures of the magi should be reserved until Epiphany. During the season of Christmas, the magi may be placed on a window or table near the rear of the nave or in the narthex, as a reminder of their journey to Bethlehem and of the relationship between Christmas and Epiphany.

The altar guild needs to be prepared for large numbers of communicants at Christmas liturgies and should have adequate supplies of bread and wine on the offertory table or credence, and an ample number of purificators on the credence.

Epiphany

The Epiphany of our Lord is celebrated on January 6, marking the manifestation of Christ to the whole world. The coming of the magi to Bethlehem is reported in the gospel reading for this festival; this event may be made vivid by adding the figures of

the magi to the creche during the entrance procession. Figures of the shepherds and perhaps the animals may be removed in advance.

White is the appointed color for Epiphany, a reminder that it is a festival of light.

On Epiphany Eve or following the Epiphany Day liturgy, there may be a ceremony of the burning of the greens. This may take place in the church parking lot or another safe place. Municipal permission and/or fire protection may be necessary.

The Epiphany Season

The first and last Sundays after the Epiphany are festivals. The Second through the Eighth Sundays after the Epiphany use green paraments as a symbol of our growth in knowing Jesus as God's Son.

The Baptism of Our Lord

The First Sunday after the Epiphany is the Baptism of Our Lord, in observance of his Baptism by St. John the Baptist in the Jordan River and, in that event, Jesus' designation as the Son of God. Paraments for this day are white, since it is a festival of Christ. A baptismal festival may be held on this day (see chap. 6 regarding preparations for Holy Baptism).

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

The Transfiguration of Our Lord is celebrated on the Last Sunday after the Epiphany as a climax to the season and a prelude to Lent. Paraments for the Transfiguration are white.

Ash Wednesday

Since at least the seventh century, Ash Wednesday has been observed as the first day of Lent. The name is taken from the ancient tradition of placing ashes on the foreheads of penitents. In the biblical tradition, ashes represent God's condemnation of sin, human dependence on God for life, humiliation and repentance. Ashes are a reminder of death: "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

Ashes for the imposition are made from palms from the

previous year's observance of the Sunday of the Passion. The palms are cut into small pieces and burned with rubbing alcohol or solid fuel firestarters. After enough has been burned, work the ash through a fine wire mesh sieve. The ash may be mixed with a small amount of oil or water and placed in a small bowl or other container for the imposition. A lavabo bowl and towel will need to be provided for cleansing the minister's hands after the imposition of ashes.

Ash Wednesday, the most penitential day of the church year, may occur between February 4 and March 10.

Paraments for Ash Wednesday may be black (the color of ashes, humiliation, and mourning) or purple (the color of penitence).

Flowers are not appropriate on Ash Wednesday, and the empty vases should also be removed from the chancel. Other festive decorations, such as banners, are also removed. From Ash Wednesday through the Saturday of Holy Week, crosses, pictures, and statues may be veiled with unbleached linen or purple fabric, as a demonstration that Lent is a time for austerity and purification.

Holy Communion is celebrated on Ash Wednesday.

Lent

Lent is the forty-day season (not including Sundays) of preparation for Easter. Traditionally, Lent has two primary themes—Baptism and penitence—both as preparation for a worthy celebration of the paschal feast. Lent does not focus on our Lord's passion; that is the focus of Holy Week.

Paraments for Lent are purple, the color of penitence.

Flowers, being a symbol of joy, may be omitted during Lent in order to help the congregation absorb the penitential character of the season. Empty vases, of course, are always removed when not in use.

The Sunday of the Passion

The first day of Holy Week is the Sunday of the Passion, also known as Palm Sunday. The mood of this day, reflecting its double name, is a mixture of triumph and tragedy. We observe

both Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem as well as his death on the cross.

Paraments are scarlet, the dark red color of blood. The alternate color is purple, the penitential color of Lent. It is good to have scarlet, however, to help distinguish Holy Week from the remainder of Lent.

Palms may replace flowers in the chancel for this day.

The altar guild is usually responsible for obtaining and preparing a sufficient quantity of palm branches for this day's procession. Several palm branches should be saved and dried for making ashes for the following year's Ash Wednesday liturgy.

The presiding minister may wear a scarlet or purple cope during the entrance rite on the Sunday of the Passion.

Maundy Thursday

Maundy Thursday recalls the institution of the Eucharist during the Last Supper in the Upper Room. The name of the day is from the Latin word *mandatum*, which means command. It refers to Jesus' words at the Last Supper, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another."

Paraments for Maundy Thursday are scarlet or white. Altar flowers are appropriate and should coordinate with the color of the paraments.

Holy Communion is always celebrated on Maundy Thursday. If your parish usually uses hosts (wafers), Maundy Thursday is a day to consider using real bread in order to emphasize the meal character of this sacrament.

A foot-washing ceremony, emphasizing Jesus' servanthood, is an optional part of the Maundy Thursday liturgy. A basin, a pitcher of hot water (so that it is still warm by the time of the foot-washing), an apron, and lavabo bowl and towel for the presiding minister, and a chair and towel for each participant need to be prepared before the service.

Following the Maundy Thursday liturgy, the altar is stripped as a symbolic remembrance of Christ's humiliation by the soldiers. The altar guild may be asked to assist the presiding minister by carrying the eucharistic vessels, candles, ornaments,

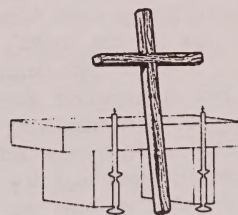
linens, paraments, and all other furnishings into the sacristy. The sacristy should be clean and ready for all of these items. During the stripping of the altar, a cantor or the choir sings Psalm 22 and/or 88. The chancel and altar remain bare until the Easter Vigil.

Maundy Thursday is the first day of the Triduum, the three days of intense observance of the paschal mystery. Beginning with Maundy Thursday evening, the Triduum concludes Easter Evening. It is the most sacred and important time of the entire church year.

Good Friday

The original name of this day was probably "God's Friday." It is a day to celebrate the sacrifice on the cross of Christ, our Passover Lamb. The altar is bare of all linens and other furnishings. It is preferable for paraments to be omitted on Good Friday, but if they are used, they should be scarlet or black. Flowers are not used on Good Friday.

It is not Lutheran custom to celebrate Holy Communion on Good Friday; this day's focus is the cross. The altar is not used at all during the Good Friday liturgy. Instead, the rite centers at one or more reading desks.



A large rough-hewn wooden cross may be prepared for the Good Friday Liturgy in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. It may be placed in the narthex in readiness for its procession near the conclusion of the liturgy, or it may be placed in front of the altar (leaning against the altar or the Communion rail, or placed in a stand). A tall, lighted candle may be placed on a floor stand on each side of the cross.

If the service of Tenebrae is used, the altar guild will need to prepare a triangular candelabrum known as the Tenebrae hearse. Candles are extinguished individually following the reading of each Psalm, representing humankind falling away

from Christ. The paschal candle is not used in *Tenebrae*; it is reserved for Easter itself.

The Vigil of Easter

The Easter Vigil is the most dramatic liturgy of the year, the climax of all of our spiritual preparations during Lent and Holy Week. It is a liturgy filled with contrasts between light and darkness, freedom and bondage, life and death. The Easter Vigil liturgy consists of four parts: the Service of Light, the Service of Readings, the Service of Holy Baptism, and the Service of Holy Communion.

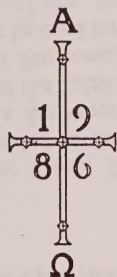
Easter preparations are made with white or gold paraments and flowers. Linens and ornaments that had been removed on Maundy Thursday are now replaced.

The paschal candle leads the Easter Vigil procession, and its stand should be placed in readiness near the center approach to the altar. A new paschal candle is normally acquired each year for this service. A cross, the Greek letters *alpha* and *omega*, and numerals of the current year are inscribed on the candle before the service. Traditionally the presiding minister, while doing so, says the words: "Christ yesterday and today [cross]; the beginning and the end [*alpha* and *omega*]; his are all times [1] and all ages [9]; to him be glory and dominion [8], through all the ages of eternity [6]. Amen." Grains of incense are placed in readiness near the candle stand, for insertion during the Easter Proclamation.

A large fire may be built in a brazier or on the ground outside the church building, in preparation for the lighting of the paschal candle. If such a fire is not feasible, it may be struck from flint and steel.

Four to twelve biblical readings are used in the Vigil, and they should be marked in the Bible for the convenience of the lectors.

The usual preparations are made for Holy Baptism (see chap. 6). Even if Holy Baptism is not actually celebrated at the Easter



Vigil, the renewal of baptismal vows will occur, and the font should be filled with water, or a filled ewer may be placed near the font. An evergreen bough for sprinkling may be placed near the font for use during the renewal of baptismal vows.

The usual preparations are made for the Eucharist (see chap. 7). Consider using a loaf of raised bread as a symbolic reminder of our Lord's resurrection.

Easter

The festival of the Resurrection of Our Lord is the queen of all Christian festivals, and all preparations for its celebration should make its significance apparent. All of the furnishings and appointments should be thoroughly cleaned and polished. The best linens should be used, and they should be spotlessly white and newly ironed. Gold paraments may be used on Easter Day; white paraments are used during the rest of the Easter season. All paraments and vestments should be cleaned and ironed in preparation for the Easter celebration.

White or gold flowers are appropriate, and abundant Easter lilies and other flowers (including tulips, daffodils, and blooming azaleas) may be used to adorn the chancel. Flowers and plants, however, are never placed on the altar itself. All decorations should serve to direct worshippers' attention to the altar, the paschal candle, the font, and the pulpit or reading desk.

The paschal candle in its floor stand is placed near the gospel side of the altar (the left side as one faces the altar). It is lighted for all worship services from Easter Eve through the Day of Pentecost, as a reminder of the unity of these great fifty days of celebration.

The Eucharist should never be excluded from any Easter liturgy, since Easter is the paschal feast. The altar guild will need to prepare for large numbers of communicants, having adequate supplies of bread, wine, and purificators ready for use. (See chap. 7.)

Easter Day occurs between March 22 and April 25. The Easter celebration lasts for fifty days, and it is helpful to have

abundant flowers throughout the season (replacing them with fresh flowers as necessary, of course).

The Ascension of Our Lord

The festival of the Ascension is forty days after Easter, and it celebrates Christ's triumphant ascension from the Mount of Olives to heaven.

White paraments are used, and white flowers are fitting.

The paschal candle may be extinguished at the reading of the gospel on Ascension Day. However, it is better to allow the candle to burn through the Day of Pentecost. Regardless of when it is extinguished, it is moved after that service to its place near the font (where it is lighted only on days when Holy Baptism is celebrated).

The Day of Pentecost

The Day of Pentecost occurs fifty days after Easter. It celebrates the time when the Holy Spirit descended to the believers gathered in Jerusalem. It is, therefore, a day when decorations and ceremonies should be reminders of the Spirit.

Bright red paraments are used on the Day of Pentecost, reminders of the fire of the Spirit. Red gladioli may be used for altar flowers, since their shape suggests tongues of fire. To emphasize the importance of this festival, the chancel may be adorned with red geraniums or other red flowers. They should be arranged to call attention to the altar, although plants and flowers are never placed on the mensa of the altar. Following Pentecost worship services, the geraniums may be planted on the church grounds.

Pentecost is an appropriate day for full and festive processions, and banners may be made in preparation for the procession. Bells may be attached to the banners to add a joyous note to the day. The presiding minister may wear a red cope for the Pentecost procession.

Holy Communion is normally celebrated on this festival, and the altar guild will make the usual preparations. (See chap. 7.)

Since the Day of Pentecost is an appropriate time for Holy Baptism as well as for Affirmation of Baptism (Confirmation), the altar guild should seek advance instructions from the pastor. (See chap. 6 regarding Baptism, and chap. 9 regarding Confirmation preparations.)

The Season after Pentecost

Except for festivals, Sundays after Pentecost use green paraments as a reminder that this is a season of spiritual growth.

The Holy Trinity

This festival occurs on the First Sunday after Pentecost, and it celebrates the doctrine of the Trinity, one God in three persons. Paraments are white.

Reformation Day

Reformation Day occurs on October 31, but it may be observed on the Sunday preceding that date. It is a day for giving thanks for Martin Luther and the other reformers, but it also calls attention to the ongoing need for renewal of the church. Paraments are bright red.

All Saints' Day

This festival commemorates all the baptized people of God who have died in the faith. All Saints' Day is November 1, but it may be observed on the Sunday following that date. The liturgical color is white.

Thanksgiving

Although it is a civil rather than a religious holiday, it has become common for churches to hold worship services on Thanksgiving Eve or Day. The liturgical color is white. Restrained decorations of the fruits of the earth—such as grapes, sheaves of grain, ears or stalks of corn—are appropriate, but should not draw attention away from the altar.

Since the word Eucharist comes from the Greek word for thanksgiving, it is fitting to celebrate Holy Communion at

Thanksgiving. Real bread rather than wafers may be used, as a reminder that God uses the fruits of the earth for God's gracious purposes.

• *Christ the King*

The last Sunday after Pentecost celebrates the kingship of Christ and is so named. The liturgical color is white.

12

Organization

To be effective servants of the liturgy, an altar guild needs to be organized in a way that facilitates its work. Criteria for membership and principles of organization are established by the pastor and the parish worship committee, and are approved by the church council. A sample constitution is included in appendix B of this book.

Membership

An important qualification for all members of the altar guild is a sense of awe in the presence of the Holy God. This awe gives rise to the spirit of reverence that is so essential to the altar guild's work. The ministry of liturgical preparations is a high privilege for a Christian, and dedicated altar guild members will carry out their responsibilities with awe, joy, gratitude, and love for their Lord. Tasks of the altar guild are not a burden but a delight, not a duty but a high privilege. There is no room in the altar guild for complaining or grumbling. If the work cannot be done with joy and a sense of privilege, a replacement should be sought.

Another important characteristic is humility. While it is necessary for altar guild members to be skilled in various ways, each member is only one among many servants of the liturgy. The privilege of serving God is shared with other altar guild

God be with you.
And also with you.
 Lift up your hearts.
We lift them up to God.
 Let us give thanks to the Almighty God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing,
 always and everywhere
 to give thanks to you,
 Sovereign of the Ages,
 whose strong and loving arms
 embrace the universe,
 for with your eternal Word and Holy Spirit
 you are for ever one God.

You created all things
 and called them good.
 You formed us in your image
 and breathed into us the breath of life.
 When we turned away, and our love failed,
 your love remained steadfast.
 You delivered us from captivity,
 made covenant to be our sovereign God,
 and spoke to us through your prophets.

And so, with your people on earth
 and all the company of heaven,
 we praise your name
 and join their unending hymn:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,
 God of power and might,
 heaven and earth are full of your glory.
 Hosanna in the highest.
 Blessed is the One
 who comes in the name of the Lord.
 Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy are you,
 and blessed is your eternal Word,
 who became flesh
 and came to dwell among us
 in Jesus Christ:
 whom your Spirit anointed
 to preach good news to the poor,
 to proclaim release to the captives
 and recovering of sight to the blind,

to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
 and to announce that the time had come
 when you would save your people;
 who healed the sick, fed the hungry,
 and ate with sinners.

By the baptism of Jesus' suffering,
 death, and resurrection,
 you gave birth to your Church,
 delivered us from slavery to sin and death,
 and made with us a new covenant
 by water and the Spirit.
 Jesus ascended with the promise
 to be with us always,
 in the power of your Word and Holy Spirit.

On the night before meeting with death,
 Jesus took bread,
 gave thanks to you,
 broke the bread,
 gave it to the disciples, and said:
 "Take, eat;
 this is my body which is given for you.
 Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over
 Jesus took the cup,
 gave thanks to you,
 gave it to the disciples, and said:
 "Drink from this, all of you;
 this is my blood of the new covenant,
 poured out for you and for many
 for the forgiveness of sins.
 Do this, as often as you drink it,
 in remembrance of me."

And so, in remembrance
 of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,
 we offer ourselves
 in praise and thanksgiving
 as a holy and living sacrifice,
 in union with Christ's offering for us,
 as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

**Christ has died,
 Christ is risen,
 Christ will come again.**



Pour out your Holy Spirit on us,
gathered here,
and on these gifts of bread and wine.
Make them be for us
the body and blood of Christ,
that we may be for the world
the body of Christ,
redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ,
one with each other,
and one in ministry to all the world,
until Christ comes in final victory
and we feast at Christ's heavenly banquet.

Through your eternal Word Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church,
all honor and glory is yours,
Almighty God, now and for ever.

Amen.

And now,
with the confidence of children of God,
let us pray:

Our Father in heaven, (*Abba*),
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come, (*your reign begin*),
your will be done
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us in the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom (*reign*),
the power, and the glory
are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

*The minister breaks the bread in silence,
or while saying:*
Because there is one loaf,
we, who are many, are one body,
for we all partake of the one loaf.
The bread which we break
is a sharing in the body of Christ.

*The minister lifts the cup in silence,
or while saying:*
The cup over which we give thanks
is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

*The bread and wine are given to the people,
with these or other words being exchanged:*
The body of Christ, given for you. **Amen.**
The blood of Christ, given for you. **Amen.**

*The congregation sings hymns
while the bread and cup are given.*

*When all have received,
the Lord's table is put in order.*

*The following prayer is then offered
by the minister or by all:*
Eternal God,
we give you thanks for this holy mystery
in which you have given yourself to us.
Grant that we may go into the world
in the strength of your Spirit,
to give ourselves to others,
in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

A hymn or song may be sung.

The people are dismissed with the blessing:
Go forth in peace.
The grace of Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all.

Amen.

For alternative texts following this Great Thanksgiving, turn to page 58.

God be with you.
 And also with you.
 Lift up your hearts.
 We lift them up to God.
 Let us give thanks to the Almighty God.
 It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing,
 always and everywhere
 to give thanks to you, Father Almighty,
 Creator of heaven and earth.

And so, with your people on earth
 and all the company of heaven
 we praise your name
 and join their unending hymn:

Holy, holy, holy
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the One
who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

Holy are you,
 and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ.
 By the baptism
 of his suffering, death, and resurrection
 you gave birth to your Church,
 delivered us from slavery to sin and death,
 and made with us a new covenant
 by water and the Spirit.

On the night
 in which he gave himself up for us
 he took bread,
 gave thanks to you,
 broke the bread,
 gave it to his disciples, and said:
 "Take, eat;
 this is my body which is given for you.
 Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over
 he took the cup,
 gave thanks to you,
 gave it to his disciples, and said:

"Drink from this, all of you;
 this is my blood of the new covenant,
 poured out for you and for many
 for the forgiveness of sins.
 Do this, as often as you drink it,
 in remembrance of me."

And so, in remembrance
 of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,
 we offer ourselves
 in praise and thanksgiving
 as a holy and living sacrifice,
 in union with Christ's offering for us,
 as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died,
Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us,
 gathered here,
 and on these gifts of bread and wine.
 Make them be for us
 the body and blood of Christ,
 that we may be for the world
 the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ,
 one with each other,
 and one in ministry to all the world,
 until Christ comes in final victory,
 and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son Jesus Christ,
 with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church,
 all honor and glory is yours,
 Almighty Father, now and for ever.

Amen.

And now,
 with the confidence of children of God,
 let us pray:

Our Father . . .

Continue on page 13, 15, or 58.

Services 2 and 3 are intended for use in home or
 hospital settings or in other situations where brevity
 is essential.

SERVICE 3: BRIEF TEXT WITHOUT RESPONSES I 15

Lift up your heart(s)
and give thanks to the Lord our God.

Father Almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
you made us in your image,
to love and to be loved.
When we turned away, and our love failed,
your love remained steadfast.
By the suffering, death, and resurrection
of your only Son Jesus Christ
you delivered us
from slavery to sin and death
and made with us a new covenant
by water and the Spirit.

On the night
in which he gave himself up for us
he took bread,
gave thanks to you,
broke the bread,
gave it to his disciples, and said:
"Take, eat;
this is my body which is given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over
he took the cup,
gave thanks to you,
gave it to his disciples, and said:
"Drink from this, all of you;
for this is my blood of the new covenant,
poured out for you and for many
for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it,
in remembrance of me."

And so, in remembrance
of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,
we offer ourselves
in praise and thanksgiving
as a holy and living sacrifice,
in union with Christ's offering for us.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us
and on these gifts of bread and wine.
Make them be for us
the body and blood of Christ,
that we may be for the world
the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ,
one with each other,
and one in ministry to all the world,
until Christ comes in final victory,
and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church,
all honor and glory is yours,
Almighty Father, now and for ever.

Amen.

And now,
with the confidence of children of God,
let us pray:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory
are yours, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The minister breaks the bread.

*The bread and wine are given to the people,
with these or other words being exchanged:*
The body of Christ, given for you. **Amen.**
The blood of Christ, given for you. **Amen.**

*When all have received,
the Lord's table is put in order.*

Thanks may be given after Communion.

A hymn or song may be sung.

The minister gives the blessing:
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all. **Amen.**

An Alternate Lectionary with Psalter⁵

ADVENT: YEAR A (1992, 1995)

1st Sunday	Ps. 122	562*	Isa. 2:1-5	Rom. 13:8-14	Matt. 24:36-44
2nd Sunday	Ps. 72:1-19	597	Isa. 11:1-10	Rom. 15:4-13	Matt. 3:1-12
3rd Sunday	Ps. 146	612	Isa. 35:1-10	James 5:7-10	Matt. 11:2-11
4th Sunday	Ps. 24	561	Isa. 7:10-15	Rom. 1:1-7	Matt. 1:18-25

CHRISTMAS SEASON: YEAR A (1993, 1995)

Christmas	Ps. 96	585	Isa. 9:2-7	Titus 2:11-15	Luke 2:1-14
1st Sunday	Ps. 111	590	Eccl. 3:1-9, 14-17	Col. 3:12-21	Matt. 2:13-15, 19-23
2nd Sunday	Ps. 147:12-20	580	Isa. 61:10-62:3*	Eph. 1:3-6, 15-18	John 1:1-18

EPIPHANY SEASON: YEAR A (1993, 1996)

Epiphany	Ps. 72:1-19	577	Isa. 60:1-6	Eph. 3:1-12	Matt. 2:1-12
1st Sunday	Ps. 29:1-4, 9-10	583	Isa. 42:1-7	Acts 10:34-38	Matt. 3:13-17
2nd Sunday	Ps. 40:1-11	568	Isa. 49:1-7	I Cor. 1:1-9	John 1:29-34
3rd Sunday	Ps. 27:1,4, 13-14	563	Isa. 9:1-4	I Cor. 1:10-17	Matt. 4:12-23
4th Sunday	Ps. 1	554	Zeph. 2:3; 3:11-13	I Cor. 1:26-31	Matt. 5:1-12
5th Sunday	Ps. 112:4-9	599	Isa. 58:5-12	I Cor. 2:1-5	Matt. 5:13-16
6th Sunday	Ps. 119:1-16	564	Deut. 30:15-20*	I Cor. 2:6-13	Matt. 5:17-37
7th Sunday	Ps. 103:1-13	587	Lev. 19:1-2, 15-18	I Cor. 3:10-11, 16-23	Matt. 5:38-48
8th Sunday	Ps. 62	573	Isa. 49:8-18	I Cor. 4:1-5	Matt. 6:24-34
Last Sunday	Ps. 2:6-11	584	Exod. 24:12, 15-18	I Cor. 12:31-13:13	Matt. 17:1-9

LENT: YEAR A (1993, 1996)

Ash	Ps. 51:1-17	571	Joel 2:12-19	II Cor. 5:20b	Matt. 6:1-6, 16-21
Wednesday					
1st Sunday	Ps. 130	581	Gen. 2:7-9, 15-17; 3:1-7a	Rom. 5:12-19	Matt. 4:1-11
2nd Sunday	Ps. 33:12-22	569	Gen. 12:1-8	Rom. 4:1-5, 13-17	John 4:5-26
3rd Sunday	Ps. 95:1-2, 6-11	558	Exod. 17:3-7	Rom. 8:1-5	John 4:27-42
4th Sunday	Ps. 23	598	I Sam. 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a	Eph. 5:8-14	John 9:1-41
5th Sunday	Ps. 116:1-9	615	Ezek. 37:1-3, 11-14	Rom. 8:6-11	John 11:1-45
Palm Sunday	Ps. 22:1-11	559	Isa. 50:4-9a	Phil. 2:5-11	Matt. 26:14-27:66

LENT: YEAR A (cont'd.)

Monday	Ps. 36:5-10	572	Isa. 42:1-9	Heb. 9:11-15	John 12:1-11
Tuesday	Ps. 71:1-12, 15,17	567	Isa. 49:1-9a	I Cor. 1:18-31	John 12:37-50
Wednesday	Ps. 70:1-2, 4-5	578	Isa. 50:4-9	Rom. 5:6-11	Matt. 26:14-25
Thursday	Ps. 116:12-19	591	Exod. 12:1-14	I Cor. 11:23-26	John 13:1-15
Good Friday	Ps. 22:1-18	559	Isa. 52:13-53:12	Heb. 4:14-16; 5:7-9	John 18:1-19:42

SEASON OF EASTER: YEAR A (1993, 1996)

Easter Eve	Gen. 1:1-2:2	Ps. 33:1-11	Gen. 22:1-18	Ps. 33:12-22	
	Exod. 14:15-15:1	Exod. 15:1-6, 17-18	Isa. 54:5-14		
	Ps. 30:2-6, 11-13	Isa. 55:1-11	Isa. 12:2-6	Ezek. 36:16-28	
	Ps. 42:1-7; 43:3-4	Zeph. 3:14-17, 19-20	Ps. 98	Rom. 6:3-11	
	Ps. 114	Matt. 28:1-10			
Easter Day	Ps. 118:1-2, 14-24	592	Acts 10:34-43	Col. 3:1-11	John 20:1-9
2nd Sunday	Ps. 105:1-7	605	Acts 2:42-47	I Pet. 1:3-9	John 20:19-31
3rd Sunday	Ps. 16	600	Acts 2:22-32	I Pet. 1:17-23	Luke 24:13-35
4th Sunday	Ps. 23	560	Acts 2:14a, 36-41	I Pet. 2:19-25	John 10:1-10
5th Sunday	Ps. 33:1-11	565	Acts 6:1-7	I Pet. 2:1-10	John 14:1-14
6th Sunday	Ps. 66:1-7, 16-20	576	Acts 8:4-8, 14-17	I Pet. 3:8-18	John 14:15-21
Ascension	Ps. 110	561	Acts 1:1-11	Eph. 1:16-23	Matt. 28:16-20
7th Sunday	Ps. 47	561	Acts 1:12-14	I Pet. 4:12-19	John 17:1-11
Pentecost	Ps. 104:1-4, 24-33	583	Acts 2:1-21	I Cor. 12:4-13	John 20:19-23

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST: YEAR A (1993, 1996)

1st Sunday	Ps. 150	555	Exod. 34:4-6, 8-9	II Cor. 13:5-13	Matt. 28:16-20
2nd Sunday	Ps. 31:1-5, 19-24	606	Deut. 11:18-21, 26-28	Rom. 3:21-28	Matt. 7:21-29
3rd Sunday	Ps. 50:1-15	570	Hos. 6:1-6	Rom. 4:18-25	Matt. 9:9-13
4th Sunday	Ps. 100	611	Exod. 19:2-6a	Rom. 5:6-11	Matt. 9:35-10:8
5th Sunday	Ps. 69:1-18, 34-36	574	Jer. 20:7-13	Rom. 5:12-15	Matt. 10:26-33
6th Sunday	Ps. 89:1-4, 15-18	557	II Kings 4:8-16	Rom. 6:1-11	Matt. 10:34-42
7th Sunday	Ps. 145	602	Zech. 9:9-13	Rom. 7:21-8:6	Matt. 11:25-30
8th Sunday	Ps. 65	575	Isa. 55:10-13	Rom. 8:18-25	Matt. 13:1-23
9th Sunday	Ps. 86:11-17	556	II Sam. 7:18-22*	Rom. 8:26-27	Matt. 13:24-43
10th Sunday	Ps. 119:129-36	594	I Kings 3:5-12	Rom. 8:28-30	Matt. 13:44-52
11th Sunday	Ps. 78:14-20, 23-29	572	Neh. 9:16-20	Rom. 8:35-39	Matt. 14:13-21

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST: YEAR A (cont'd.)

12th Sunday	Ps. 85:8-13	566	I Kings 19:9-18	Rom. 9:1-5	Matt. 14:22-33
13th Sunday	Ps. 67	567	Isa. 56:1, 6-8	Rom. 11:13-16, 29-32	Matt. 15:21-28
14th Sunday	Ps. 138	578	Isa. 22:15-16, 19-23	Rom. 11:33-36	Matt. 16:13-20
15th Sunday	Ps. 26	586	Jer. 15:15-21	Rom. 12:1-8	Matt. 16:21-28
16th Sunday	Ps. 119:33-40	604	Ezek. 33:7-11	Rom. 12:9-18	Matt. 18:15-20
17th Sunday	Ps. 103:1-13	588	Gen. 4:13-16 ¹¹	Rom. 14:5-9	Matt. 18:21-35
18th Sunday	Ps. 27:1-9	601	Isa. 55:6-11	Phil. 1:21-27	Matt. 20:1-16
19th Sunday	Ps. 25:1-10	603	Ezek. 18:25-32	Phil. 2:1-11	Matt. 21:28-32
20th Sunday	Ps. 80:7-15, 18-19	607	Isa. 5:1-7	Phil. 4:4-9	Matt. 21:33-43
21st Sunday	Ps. 23	579	Isa. 25:6-10a	Phil. 4:12-20	Matt. 22:1-14
22nd Sunday	Ps. 96	595	Isa. 45:1-7	I Thess. 1:1-5	Matt. 22:15-22
23rd Sunday	Ps. 18:1-3, 46, 50	596	Exod. 22:21-27	I Thess. 1:2-10	Matt. 22:34-46
24th Sunday	Ps. 131	593	Mal. 1:14b-2:2b, 8-10	I Thess. 2:7-13	Matt. 23:1-12
25th Sunday	Ps. 63:1-7	589	Song of Sol. 3:1-5 ¹²	I Thess. 3:7-13	Matt. 24:1-14
26th Sunday	Ps. 128	613	Prov. 31:10-12, 20, 26-31	I Thess. 4:13-18	Matt. 25:1-13
27th Sunday	Ps. 105:1-7	564	Jer. 26:1-6	I Thess. 5:1-10	Matt. 25:14-15, 19-30
Last Sunday	Ps. 95:1-7	582	Ezek. 34:11-17	I Cor. 15:20-28	Matt. 25:31-46
All Saints'	Ps. 24:1-6	566	Isa. 26:1-4, 8-9, 12-13, 19-21	Rev. 7:9-17	Matt. 5:1-12

ADVENT: YEAR B (1993, 1996)

1st Sunday	Ps. 80:1-7	562	Isa. 63:16-64:8	I Cor. 1:3-9	Mark 13:32-37
2nd Sunday	Ps. 85	597	Isa. 40:1-11	II Pet. 3:8-14	Mark 1:1-8
3rd Sunday	Luke 1:46b-55	612	Isa. 61:1-4, 8-11	I Thess. 5:16-24	John 1:6-8, 19-28
4th Sunday	Ps. 89:1-4, 14-18	561	II Sam. 7:1-5, 7-16	Rom. 16:25-27	Luke 1:26-38

CHRISTMAS SEASON: YEAR B (1993, 1996)

Christmas	Ps. 98	585	Isa. 62:6-12	Titus 3:4-7	Luke 2:15-20
1st Sunday	Ps. 111	590	Jer. 31:10-13 ¹³	Heb. 2:10-18	Luke 2:22-40
2nd Sunday	Ps. 147:12-20	580	Isa. 61:10-62:3 ¹⁴	Rev. 21:22-22:2	John 1:1-18

EPIPHANY SEASON: YEAR B (1993, 1996)

Epiphany	Ps. 72:1-19	577	Isa. 60:1-6	Eph. 3:1-12	Matt. 2:1-12
1st Sunday	Ps. 29:1-4, 9-10	583	Isa. 42:1-7	Acts 10:34-38	Mark 1:4-11

EPIPHANY SEASON: YEAR B (cont'd.)

2nd Sunday	Ps. 67	568	I Sam. 3:1-10	I Cor. 6:12-20	John 1:35-42
3rd Sunday	Ps. 62:5-12	563	Jon. 3:1-5, 10	I Cor. 7:29-31	Mark 1:14-20
4th Sunday	Ps. 1	554	Deut. 18:15-22	I Cor. 7:32-35	Mark 1:21-28
5th Sunday	Ps. 147:1-12	599	Job 7:1-7	I Cor. 9:16-23	Mark 1:29-39
6th Sunday	Ps. 32	564	Lev. 13:1-2, 44-46	I Cor. 10:31-11:1	Mark 1:40-45
7th Sunday	Ps. 41	587	Isa. 43:15-25	II Cor. 1:18-22	Mark 2:1-12
8th Sunday	Ps. 103:1-13	573	Hos. 2:14-23	II Cor. 3:1b-6	Mark 2:18-22
Last Sunday	Ps. 50:1-6	584	II Kings 2:1-12a	II Cor. 4:3-6	Mark 9:2-9

LENT: YEAR B (1993, 1996)

Ash	Ps. 51:1-17	571	Joel 2:12-19	James 1:12-18	Mark 2:15-20
Wednesday	Ps. 25:3-9	581	Gen. 9:8-15	I Pet. 3:18-22	Mark 1:12-15
1st Sunday	Ps. 115:1, 9-18	569	Gen. 28:10-17	Rom. 8:31-34	Mark 10:32-45
2nd Sunday	Ps. 19:7-14	558	Exod. 20:1-17	I Cor. 1:22-25	John 2:13-22
3rd Sunday	Ps. 137:1-6	598	II Chron. 36:14-21	Eph. 2:1-10	John 3:14-21
4th Sunday	Ps. 51:10-16	615	Jer. 31:31-34	Heb. 5:7-10	John 12:20-33
Palm Sunday	Ps. 22:7-8, 16-19, 22-23	559	Zech. 9:9-12	Phil. 2:5-11	Mark 14:1-15:47
Monday	Ps. 36:5-10	572	Isa. 42:1-9	Heb. 9:11-15	John 12:1-11
Tuesday	Ps. 71:1-12, 15, 17	567	Isa. 49:1-9a	I Cor. 1:18-31	John 12:37-50
Wednesday	Ps. 70:1-2, 4-5	578	Isa. 50:4-9	Rom. 5:6-11	Matt. 26:14-25
Thursday	Ps. 116:12-19	591	Deut. 16:1-8	I Cor. 10:16-21	Mark 14:12-26
Good Friday	Ps. 31:1-5, 9-16	559	Lam. 1:7-12	Heb. 10:14-18	Luke 23:33-46

SEASON OF EASTER: YEAR B (1993, 1996)

Easter Eve	Same as Year A except for the final lection			I Pet. 1:3-9	Mark 16:1-8
Easter Day	Ps. 118:1-2, 14-24	592	Isa. 25:6-9		Mark 16:1-8
2nd Sunday	Ps. 148	605	Acts 4:32-37	I John 5:1-6	John 20:19-31
3rd Sunday	Ps. 139:1-12	600	Acts 3:13-15, 17-19	I John 2:1-6	Luke 24:35-49
4th Sunday	Ps. 23	560	Acts 4:5-12	I John 3:1-8	John 10:11-18
5th Sunday	Ps. 22:25-31	565	Acts 9:26-31	I John 3:18-24	John 15:1-8
6th Sunday	Ps. 98	576	Acts 11:5a, 11-18	I John 4:1-11	John 15:9-17
Ascension	Ps. 110	561	Acts 1:1-11	Eph. 1:16-23	Mark 16:15-20
7th Sunday	Ps. 47	561	Acts 1:15-26	I John 4:11-16	John 17:11-19
Pentecost	Ps. 104:1-4, 24-33	583	Joel 2:28-32	Acts 2:1-21	John 18:5-15

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST: YEAR B (1993, 1996)

1st Sunday	Ps. 149	555	Deut. 4:32-34, 39-40	Rom. 8:12-17	Matt. 28:16-20
2nd Sunday	Ps. 81:1-10	606	Deut. 5:12-15	II Cor. 4:7-11	Mark 2:23-3:6
3rd Sunday	Ps. 61:1-5, 8	570	Gen. 3:9-15	II Cor. 4:13-5:1	Mark 3:20-35
4th Sunday	Ps. 92	611	Ezek. 17:22-24	II Cor. 5:6-10	Mark 4:26-34
5th Sunday	Ps. 107:1-3, 23-32	574	Job 38:1-11, 16-18	II Cor. 5:14-17	Mark 4:35-41
6th Sunday	Ps. 30	557	Lam. 3:22-33 ¹¹	II Cor. 8:1-9, 13-15	Mark 5:21-43
7th Sunday	Ps. 123	602	Ezek. 2:1-5	II Cor. 12:7-10	Mark 6:1-6
8th Sunday	Ps. 85:7-13	575	Amos 7:10-15	Eph. 1:3-14	Mark 6:7-13
9th Sunday	Ps. 23	556	Jer. 23:1-6	Eph. 2:13-22	Mark 6:30-44
10th Sunday	Ps. 145	594	II Kings 4:42-44	Eph. 4:1-6, 11-16	John 6:1-15
11th Sunday	Ps. 78:14-20, 23-29	572	Exod. 16:2-15	Eph. 4:17-25	John 6:24-35
12th Sunday	Ps. 34:1-8	566	I Kings 19:4-8	Eph. 4:30-5:2	John 6:41-52
13th Sunday	Ps. 34:9-14	567	Prov. 9:1-6	Eph. 5:15-20	John 6:51-59
14th Sunday	Ps. 34:15-22	578	Josh. 24:1-2a, 14-18	Eph. 5:21-33	John 6:60-69
15th Sunday	Ps. 15	586	Deut. 4:1-8	James 1:17-22, 26-27	Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23
16th Sunday	Ps. 146	604	Isa. 35:4-7a	James 2:1-5	Mark 7:31-37
17th Sunday	Ps. 116:1-9	588	Isa. 50:4-10	James 2:14-18	Mark 8:27-38
18th Sunday	Ps. 54	601	Jer. 11:18-20 ¹⁶	James 3:13-4:3	Mark 9:30-37
19th Sunday	Ps. 135:1-7, 13-14	603	Num. 11:24-30	James 5:1-6	Mark 9:38-50
20th Sunday	Ps. 128	607	Gen. 2:18-24	Heb. 2:9-13	Mark 10:2-16
21st Sunday	Ps. 90:1-8, 12-17	579	Prov. 3:13-20 ¹⁷	Heb. 3:1-6	Mark 10:17-30
22nd Sunday	Ps. 91:9-16	595	Isa. 53:10-12	Heb. 4:12-16	Mark 10:35-45
23rd Sunday	Ps. 126	596	Jer. 31:7-9	Heb. 4:2-10	Mark 10:46-52
24th Sunday	Ps. 119:1-16	593	Deut. 6:1-9	Heb. 7:23-28	Mark 12:28-34
25th Sunday	Ps. 107:1-3, 33-43	589	I Kings 17:8-16	Heb. 9:24-28	Mark 12:38-44
26th Sunday	Ps. 16	613	Dan. 12:1-4	Heb. 10:11-18	Mark 13:14-23
27th Sunday	Ps. 111	564	Dan. 7:9-10	Heb. 10:31-39	Mark 13:24-32
Last Sunday	Ps. 93	582	Dan. 7:13-14	Rev. 1:4b-8	John 18:33-37
All Saints'	Ps. 24:1-6	566	Rev. 7:2-4, 9-14	I John 3:1-3	Matt. 5:1-12

ADVENT: YEAR C (1991, 1994)

1st Sunday	Ps. 25:1-10	562	Jer. 33:14-16	I Thess. 3:9-4:2	Luke 21:25-36
2nd Sunday	Ps. 126	597	Isa. 9:2, 6-7 ¹⁸	Phil. 1:3-11	Luke 3:1-6
3rd Sunday	Isa. 12:2-6	612	Zeph. 3:14-18a	Phil. 4:4-9	Luke 3:7-18
4th Sunday	Ps. 80:1-7	561	Mic. 5:1-5a	Heb. 10:5-10	Luke 1:39-49

CHRISTMAS SEASON: YEAR C (1991, 1994-1995)

Christmas	Ps. 97	585	Isa. 52:6-10	Heb. 1:1-9	John 1:1-18
1st Sunday	Ps. 111	590	Isa. 60:13-21 ¹⁹	Gal. 4:4-7	Luke 2:41-52
2nd Sunday	Ps. 147:12-20	580	Job 28:20-28 ²⁰	I Cor. 1:18-25	Luke 2:36-40

EPIPHANY SEASON: YEAR C (1992, 1995)

Epiphany	Ps. 72:1-19	577	Isa. 60:1-6	Eph. 3:1-12	Matt. 2:1-12
1st Sunday	Ps. 29:1-4, 9-10	583	Isa. 42:1-7	Acts 10:34-38	Luke 3:15-17, 21-22
2nd Sunday	Ps. 36:5-10	568	Isa. 62:1-5	I Cor. 12:3-11	John 2:1-12
3rd Sunday	Ps. 113	563	Neh. 8:1-4a, 5-6, 8-10	I Cor. 12:12-30	Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21
4th Sunday	Ps. 71:1-6, 15-17	554	Jer. 1:4-10	I Cor. 12:31-13:13	Luke 4:21-30
5th Sunday	Ps. 138	599	Isa. 6:1-8	I Cor. 15:1-11	Luke 5:1-11
6th Sunday	Ps. 1	564	Jer. 17:5-10	I Cor. 15:12-20	Luke 6:17-26
7th Sunday	Ps. 37:3-10	587	Gen. 45:3-8a, 15	I Cor. 15:35-38a, 42-50	Luke 6:27-38
8th Sunday	Ps. 92	673	Isa. 55:5, 10-13 ²¹	I Cor. 15:50-58	Luke 6:39-45
Last Sunday	Ps. 99:1-5	584	Deut. 34:1-12	II Cor. 3:12-4:2	Luke 9:28-36

LENT: YEAR C (1992, 1995)

Ash	Ps. 51:1-17	571	Zech. 7:4-10	I Cor. 9:19-27	Luke 5:29-35
Wednesday					
1st Sunday	Ps. 91	581	Deut. 26:5-11	Rom. 10:8-13	Luke 4:1-13
2nd Sunday	Ps. 27:7-18	569	Gen. 15:5-12, 17-18	Phil. 3:17-4:1	Luke 13:31-35
3rd Sunday	Ps. 103:1-11	558	Exod. 3:1-8b, 10-15	I Cor. 10:1-13	Luke 13:1-9
4th Sunday	Ps. 34:1-8	598	Josh. 5:9-12	II Cor. 5:16-21	Luke 15:11-32
5th Sunday	Ps. 28:1-3, 6-9	615	Isa. 43:16-21	Phil. 3:8-14	John 8:1-11
Palm Sunday	Ps. 31:1-5, 9-16	559	Deut. 32:36-39	Phil. 2:5-11	Luke 22:14-23:56
Monday	Ps. 36:5-10	572	Isa. 42:1-9	Heb. 9:11-15	John 12:1-11
Tuesday	Ps. 71:1-12, 15, 17	567	Isa. 49:1-9a	I Cor. 1:18-31	John 12:37-50
Wednesday	Ps. 70:1-2, 4-5	578	Isa. 50:4-9	Rom. 5:6-11	Matt. 26:14-25
Thursday	Ps. 116:12-19	591	Num. 9:1-3, 11-12	Heb. 10:16-30	Luke 22:7-20
Good Friday	Ps. 22:1-8, 19-31	559	Hos. 6:1-6	Heb. 9:15-22	Matt. 27:31-50

SEASON OF EASTER: YEAR C (1992, 1995)

Easter Eve	Same as Year A except for the final lection				Luke 24:1-12
Easter Day	Ps. 118:1-2, 14-24	592	Exod. 15:1-11	I Cor. 15:1-11	Luke 24:1-11
2nd Sunday	Ps. 149	605	Acts 5:12-16	Rev. 1:9-19	John 20:19-31
3rd Sunday	Ps. 30	600	Acts 5:27-42	Rev. 5:11-14	John 21:1-19
4th Sunday	Ps. 100	560	Acts 13:14, 43-52	Rev. 7:9-17	John 10:22-30
5th Sunday	Ps. 145:1-13	565	Acts. 14:19-28	Rev. 21:1-5	John 13:31-35
6th Sunday	Ps. 67	576	Acts 15:1-6, 22-29	Rev. 21:10-14, 22-23	John 14:23-29
Ascension	Ps. 110	561	Acts 1:1-11	Eph. 1:16-23	Luke 24:44-53
7th Sunday	Ps. 47	561	Acts 7:55-60	Rev. 22:12-14, 16-17, 20	John 17:20-26
Pentecost	Ps. 104:1-4, 24-33	583	Gen. 11:1-9	Acts 2:1-21	John 15:26-27; 16:4b-11

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST: YEAR C (1992, 1995)

1st Sunday	Ps. 8	555	Prov. 8:22-31	Rom. 5:1-5	John 3:1-16
2nd Sunday	Ps. 117	606	I Kings 8:38-43	Gal. 1:1-10	Luke 7:1-10
3rd Sunday	Ps. 30	570	I Kings 17:17-24	Gal. 1:11-24	Luke 7:11-17
4th Sunday	Ps. 32	611	II Sam. 12:1-10, 13	Gal. 2:11-21	Luke 7:36-8:3
5th Sunday	Ps. 63:1-8	574	Zech. 12:7-10	Gal. 3:23-29	Luke 9:18-24
6th Sunday	Ps. 16	557	I Kings 19:14-21	Gal. 4:31-5:1, 13-18	Luke 9:51-62
7th Sunday	Ps. 66:1-12, 16-20	602	Isa. 66:10-14c	Gal. 6:11-18	Luke 10:1-12, 17-20
8th Sunday	Ps. 69:30, 32-36	575	Deut. 30:9-14	Col. 1:1-12	Luke 10:25-37
9th Sunday	Ps. 15	556	Gen. 18:1-11	Col. 1:21-28	Luke 10:38-42
10th Sunday	Ps. 138	594	Gen. 18:20-33	Col. 2:6-15	Luke 11:1-13
11th Sunday	Ps. 49:1-12	572	Ecccl. 1:2; 2:18-26	Col. 3:1-11	Luke 12:13-21
12th Sunday	Ps. 33	566	Gen. 15:1-6 ²²	Heb. 11:1-2, 8-19	Luke 12:32-48
13th Sunday	Ps. 82	567	Jer. 38:1b-13	Heb. 12:1-6	Luke 12:49-56
14th Sunday	Ps. 117	578	Isa. 66:18-23	Heb. 12:7-13	Luke 13:22-30
15th Sunday	Ps. 112	586	Prov. 25:6-22 ²³	Heb. 12:18-24	Luke 14:1, 7-14
16th Sunday	Ps. 10:12-14, 16-18	604	Prov. 9:8-12 ²⁴	Philem. 1-20	Luke 14:25-33
17th Sunday	Ps. 51:1-17	588	Exod. 32:7-14	I Tim. 1:12-17	Luke 15:1-10
18th Sunday	Ps. 113	601	Amos 8:4-8	I Tim. 2:1-8	Luke 16:1-13
19th Sunday	Ps. 146	603	Amos 6:1-7	I Tim. 6:11-16	Luke 16:19-31
20th Sunday	Ps. 95:1-7	607	Hab. 1:1-3; 2:1-4	II Tim. 1:3-14	Luke 17:1-10
21st Sunday	Ps. 98:1-4	579	II Kings 5:9-17	II Tim. 2:8-13	Luke 17:11-19

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST: YEAR C (cont'd.)

22nd Sunday	Ps. 121	595	Exod. 17:8-13	II Tim. 3:14-4:5	Luke 18:1-8
23rd Sunday	Ps. 34:1-2, 15-22	596	Deut. 10:12-22 ²⁵	II Tim. 4:6-8, 16-18	Luke 18:9-14
24th Sunday	Ps. 145	593	Zeph. 1:14-16 ²⁶	II Thess. 1:11-2:2	Luke 19:1-10
25th Sunday	Ps. 148	589	I Chron. 29:10-13 ²⁷	II Thess. 2:15-3:5	Luke 20:27-38
26th Sunday	Ps. 98:1-3	613	Mal. 3:16-4:2a	II Thess. 3:6-13	Luke 21:5-19
27th Sunday	Ps. 98:4-9	564	Mal. 3:1-5; 4:5-6	I Pet. 5:6-11	Luke 17:22-23
Last Sunday	Ps. 46	582	Job 23:1-7	Col. 1:12-20	Luke 23:35-43
All Saints'	Ps. 149	566	Isa. 26:1-4, 8-9, 12-13, 19-21	Rev. 21:9-11, 22-27	John 11:32-44

SPECIAL DAYS²⁸

New Year's Day or Watch Night	580	643	Ecccl. 11:6-9; 12:13	Rev. 21:1-6a	Luke 9:57-62
Human Relations Day	573	633	Gen. 1:1-3, 26-31	Acts 10:9-15, 34	Mark 3:31-35
Festival of the Christian Home	588	658	Prov. 31:10-31	Eph. 5:25-6:4	Matt. 19:1-5, 10-14
Heritage Sunday	566	615	Isa. 52:1-2, 7-12	Rom. 5:1-11	Mark 12:28-34a
Independence Day	595	626	Deut. 1:5, 8-18	Gal. 5:13-15	John 8:31-36
Labor Day	555	624	Amos 5:11-15	Col. 3:23-25	John 6:5-14, 26-27
World Order Sunday	596	632	Mic. 4:1-5	James 4:1-12	Matt. 5:43-48
Reformation Day	570	654	Neh. 8:1-3, 5-8	Gal. 3:23-26	John 2:13-16
Drug and Alcohol Concerns Sunday	554	651	Isa. 5:11-12, 20-24	I Cor. 3:16-17	Luke 21:23-26
National Bible Sunday	593	621	Deut. 30:8-20	Rom. 15:4-13	Luke 4:16-21
Thanksgiving Day	575	607	Deut. 8:7-18	II Cor. 9:6-12	Luke 12:16-31

1st Kingdomtide
1 Chron. 29:10-18
Rev. 1-7:6-8
Matt 25:31-40

737k
1 Chron 28:1-3
Matt 20:20-28
Eph 6:10-20

11

Preparation for the Church Year

The church year is a wonderful way in which we recall and celebrate the mighty acts of God. It is a reminder of God's constant activity—not only God's interventions into human history, but also his grace-filled activity among us now. Through the liturgical year we realize that we are a part of God's ongoing saving and loving activity.

For many centuries the church year calendar has shaped our worship: the readings, the sermons, the hymns and other music, the color of the paraments, and the appearance of worship space. Through a rich observance of the church year, each season and festival can make its fullest impact on the assembled congregation. The church is the grateful recipient and careful guardian of the liturgical year. Faithful observance of it is both a privilege and a responsibility. In its ministry of preparation, it is important for the altar guild to study the background and significance of the various liturgical seasons and festivals. Each day of the church year has its own unique character and message, determined by the appointed lessons for the day. Close attention to these lessons enables us to celebrate meaningfully the events in the life of our Lord and in church history.

The church year consists most basically of two parts. The

first half recalls and celebrates the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. This is the festival half of the year, and it in turn has two divisions. The Christmas cycle consists of the seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. During this time the church focuses on the prophecies and events surrounding the incarnation. The Easter cycle is composed of the seasons of Lent and Easter, from Ash Wednesday through the Day of Pentecost. During these weeks we prepare for and observe the events surrounding our Lord's passion, death, and resurrection, and his sending of the Holy Spirit.

The second half of the church year is a more ordinary, nonfestival time. It is the season after Pentecost, known as the Time of the Church. This season begins with the Holy Trinity (First Sunday after Pentecost) and concludes with the festival of Christ the King (Last Sunday after Pentecost). During these weeks, the church concentrates on Christ's public ministry—his sermons, parables, and miracles. It is a time of growth in faith, hope, and love—and thus green paraments are used as a symbol of this growth.

Principal festivals of the church year are Easter Day, the Ascension of Our Lord, the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Trinity, Christmas Day, and the Epiphany of Our Lord. Interspersed throughout the year are lesser festivals, commemorations, days commemorating events in church history, and other occasions.

Advent

Advent consists of the four weeks before Christmas. The name of this first season of the liturgical year comes from a Latin word which means "coming." Advent focuses on this "coming" in three ways: Christ coming in the past as the baby at Bethlehem, Christ coming in the present in Word and Sacraments and in the fellowship of the church, and Christ coming again in the future at the end of time. In Advent we prepare for the celebration of Christ's coming in the incarnation, but more importantly we prepare for his second coming, when he will make all things new and judge the world in righteousness.

The preferred color for Advent is blue, the color of hope. The alternate color is purple, the royal color of the coming King. Blue, however, helps make apparent the differences between Advent and Lent.

One of the themes of Advent is darkness, and it is thus appropriate to use fewer candles during these four weeks. An Advent wreath may be hung or set near the altar. The wreath is a circle with four candles, and it may be covered with greens. The candles may all be white or blue, or perhaps purple if purple paraments are used. The earlier practice of using three purple candles and one pink candle no longer reflects our calendar and lectionary. On the First Sunday in Advent, the first candle is lighted during the Psalm following the First Lesson. On the Second Sunday in Advent, the first candle is lighted prior to the service, and the second candle is lighted during the Psalm. An additional candle is thus lighted during each Sunday in Advent until all four are lighted.

Advent is a time for visual restraint and simplicity. It is appropriate to omit altar flowers during these weeks of preparation, in order to provide a marked contrast with the festivity of Christmas. When there are no flowers, vases are removed from the chancel.

Advent should not be confused with Christmas. Christmas decorations, such as a Christmas tree, should not appear during Advent.

Christmas

Christmas is the festive celebration of the Nativity of our Lord, the Word made flesh. This celebration lasts for twelve days—from Christmas Eve through Epiphany Eve.

The liturgical color for Christmas is white, symbolizing the light and purity of Christ and our great joy at his birth. White is used for the twelve days of Christmas, except for the festivals of St. Stephen (December 26) and of the Holy Innocents (December 28), when red is used in observance of their martyrdom.

Greens and wreaths may be placed in the nave and narthex,

and the chancel may be adorned with abundant poinsettias. Plants, however, are never placed on the altar itself, nor should it be obstructed by decorations. If there is sufficient room, a Christmas tree (never artificial) may be set up. The tree may be bare or decorated with white lights and Chrismons. If lights are used, the tree should be made fireproof. Chrismons (taken from the word "Christ monograms") are symbols of Christ which may be made by the altar guild or other members of the parish. Decorations for Christmas should not be put up until after worship on the Fourth Sunday in Advent, because early decorating robs both Advent and Christmas of their full meaning.

Especially for Christmas Eve services, candles may be placed in windows of the nave and on the ends of pews as brilliant symbols of Christ, the Light of the world. If hand candles are distributed to worshipers, all fire safety precautions should be taken. For example, the altar guild should be certain that fire extinguishers are charged and readily accessible.

A Christmas creche may be placed near the altar, although it should not detract from the prominence of the altar itself. The figures may be carried in the entrance procession on Christmas Eve or Day and then placed in the creche. The figures of the magi should be reserved until Epiphany. During the season of Christmas, the magi may be placed on a window or table near the rear of the nave or in the narthex, as a reminder of their journey to Bethlehem and of the relationship between Christmas and Epiphany.

The altar guild needs to be prepared for large numbers of communicants at Christmas liturgies and should have adequate supplies of bread and wine on the offertory table or credence, and an ample number of purificators on the credence.

Epiphany

The Epiphany of our Lord is celebrated on January 6, marking the manifestation of Christ to the whole world. The coming of the magi to Bethlehem is reported in the gospel reading for this festival; this event may be made vivid by adding the figures of

the magi to the creche during the entrance procession. Figures of the shepherds and perhaps the animals may be removed in advance.

White is the appointed color for Epiphany, a reminder that it is a festival of light.

On Epiphany Eve or following the Epiphany Day liturgy, there may be a ceremony of the burning of the greens. This may take place in the church parking lot or another safe place. Municipal permission and/or fire protection may be necessary.

The Epiphany Season

The first and last Sundays after the Epiphany are festivals. The Second through the Eighth Sundays after the Epiphany use green paraments as a symbol of our growth in knowing Jesus as God's Son.

The Baptism of Our Lord

The First Sunday after the Epiphany is the Baptism of Our Lord, in observance of his Baptism by St. John the Baptist in the Jordan River and, in that event, Jesus' designation as the Son of God. Paraments for this day are white, since it is a festival of Christ. A baptismal festival may be held on this day (see chap. 6 regarding preparations for Holy Baptism).

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

The Transfiguration of Our Lord is celebrated on the Last Sunday after the Epiphany as a climax to the season and a prelude to Lent. Paraments for the Transfiguration are white.

Ash Wednesday

Since at least the seventh century, Ash Wednesday has been observed as the first day of Lent. The name is taken from the ancient tradition of placing ashes on the foreheads of penitents. In the biblical tradition, ashes represent God's condemnation of sin; human dependence on God for life; humiliation and repentance. Ashes are a reminder of death: "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

Ashes for the imposition are made from palms from the

previous year's observance of the Sunday of the Passion. The palms are cut into small pieces and burned with rubbing alcohol or solid fuel firestarters. After enough has been burned, work the ash through a fine wire mesh sieve. The ash may be mixed with a small amount of oil or water and placed in a small bowl or other container for the imposition. A lavabo bowl and towel will need to be provided for cleansing the minister's hands after the imposition of ashes.

Ash Wednesday, the most penitential day of the church year, may occur between February 4 and March 10.

Paraments for Ash Wednesday may be black (the color of ashes, humiliation, and mourning) or purple (the color of penitence).

Flowers are not appropriate on Ash Wednesday, and the empty vases should also be removed from the chancel. Other festive decorations, such as banners, are also removed. From Ash Wednesday through the Saturday of Holy Week, crosses, pictures, and statues may be veiled with unbleached linen or purple fabric, as a demonstration that Lent is a time for austerity and purification.

Holy Communion is celebrated on Ash Wednesday.

Lent

Lent is the forty-day season (not including Sundays) of preparation for Easter. Traditionally, Lent has two primary themes—Baptism and penitence—both as preparation for a worthy celebration of the paschal feast. Lent does not focus on our Lord's passion; that is the focus of Holy Week.

Paraments for Lent are purple, the color of penitence.

Flowers, being a symbol of joy, may be omitted during Lent in order to help the congregation absorb the penitential character of the season. Empty vases, of course, are always removed when not in use.

The Sunday of the Passion

The first day of Holy Week is the Sunday of the Passion, also known as Palm Sunday. The mood of this day, reflecting its double name, is a mixture of triumph and tragedy. We observe

both Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem as well as his death on the cross.

Paraments are scarlet, the dark red color of blood. The alternate color is purple, the penitential color of Lent. It is good to have scarlet, however, to help distinguish Holy Week from the remainder of Lent.

Palms may replace flowers in the chancel for this day.

The altar guild is usually responsible for obtaining and preparing a sufficient quantity of palm branches for this day's procession. Several palm branches should be saved and dried for making ashes for the following year's Ash Wednesday liturgy.

The presiding minister may wear a scarlet or purple cope during the entrance rite on the Sunday of the Passion.

Maundy Thursday

Maundy Thursday recalls the institution of the Eucharist during the Last Supper in the Upper Room. The name of the day is from the Latin word *mandatum*, which means command. It refers to Jesus' words at the Last Supper, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another."

Paraments for Maundy Thursday are scarlet or white. Altar flowers are appropriate and should coordinate with the color of the paraments.

Holy Communion is always celebrated on Maundy Thursday. If your parish usually uses hosts (wafers), Maundy Thursday is a day to consider using real bread in order to emphasize the meal character of this sacrament.

A foot-washing ceremony, emphasizing Jesus' servanthood, is an optional part of the Maundy Thursday liturgy. A basin, a pitcher of hot water (so that it is still warm by the time of the foot-washing), an apron, and lavabo bowl and towel for the presiding minister, and a chair and towel for each participant need to be prepared before the service.

Following the Maundy Thursday liturgy, the altar is stripped as a symbolic remembrance of Christ's humiliation by the soldiers. The altar guild may be asked to assist the presiding minister by carrying the eucharistic vessels, candles, ornaments,

linens, paraments, and all other furnishings into the sacristy. The sacristy should be clean and ready for all of these items. During the stripping of the altar, a cantor or the choir sings Psalm 22 and/or 88. The chancel and altar remain bare until the Easter Vigil.

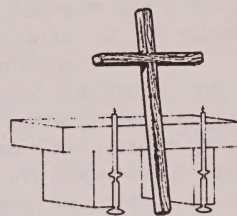
Maundy Thursday is the first day of the Triduum, the three days of intense observance of the paschal mystery. Beginning with Maundy Thursday evening, the Triduum concludes Easter Evening. It is the most sacred and important time of the entire church year.

Good Friday

The original name of this day was probably "God's Friday." It is a day to celebrate the sacrifice on the cross of Christ, our Passover Lamb. The altar is bare of all linens and other furnishings. It is preferable for paraments to be omitted on Good Friday, but if they are used, they should be scarlet or black. Flowers are not used on Good Friday.

It is not Lutheran custom to celebrate Holy Communion on Good Friday; this day's focus is the cross. The altar is not used at all during the Good Friday liturgy. Instead, the rite centers at one or more reading desks.

A large rough-hewn wooden cross may be prepared for the Good Friday Liturgy in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. It may be placed in the narthex in readiness for its procession near the conclusion of the liturgy, or it may be placed in front of the altar (leaning against the altar or the Communion rail, or placed in a stand). A tall, lighted candle may be placed on a floor stand on each side of the cross.



If the service of Tenebrae is used, the altar guild will need to prepare a triangular candelabrum known as the Tenebrae hearse. Candles are extinguished individually following the reading of each Psalm, representing humankind falling away

from Christ. The paschal candle is not used in *Tenebrae*; it is reserved for Easter itself.

The Vigil of Easter

The Easter Vigil is the most dramatic liturgy of the year, the climax of all of our spiritual preparations during Lent and Holy Week. It is a liturgy filled with contrasts between light and darkness, freedom and bondage, life and death. The Easter Vigil liturgy consists of four parts: the Service of Light, the Service of Readings, the Service of Holy Baptism, and the Service of Holy Communion.

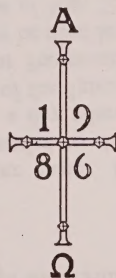
Easter preparations are made with white or gold paraments and flowers. Linens and ornaments that had been removed on Maundy Thursday are now replaced.

The paschal candle leads the Easter Vigil procession, and its stand should be placed in readiness near the center approach to the altar. A new paschal candle is normally acquired each year for this service. A cross, the Greek letters *alpha* and *omega*, and numerals of the current year are inscribed on the candle before the service. Traditionally the presiding minister, while doing so, says the words "Christ yesterday and today [cross]; the beginning and the end [*alpha* and *omega*]; his are all times [1] and all ages [9]; to him be glory and dominion [8], through all the ages of eternity [6]. Amen." Grains of incense are placed in readiness near the candle stand, for insertion during the Easter Proclamation.

A large fire may be built in a brazier or on the ground outside the church building, in preparation for the lighting of the paschal candle. If such a fire is not feasible, it may be struck from flint and steel.

Four to twelve biblical readings are used in the Vigil, and they should be marked in the Bible for the convenience of the lectors.

The usual preparations are made for Holy Baptism (see chap. 6). Even if Holy Baptism is not actually celebrated at the Easter



Vigil, the renewal of baptismal vows will occur, and the font should be filled with water, or a filled ewer may be placed near the font. An evergreen bough for sprinkling may be placed near the font for use during the renewal of baptismal vows.

The usual preparations are made for the Eucharist (see chap. 7). Consider using a loaf of raised bread as a symbolic reminder of our Lord's resurrection.

Easter

The festival of the Resurrection of Our Lord is the queen of all Christian festivals, and all preparations for its celebration should make its significance apparent. All of the furnishings and appointments should be thoroughly cleaned and polished. The best linens should be used, and they should be spotlessly white and newly ironed. Gold paraments may be used on Easter Day; white paraments are used during the rest of the Easter season. All paraments and vestments should be cleaned and ironed in preparation for the Easter celebration.

White or gold flowers are appropriate, and abundant Easter lilies and other flowers (including tulips, daffodils, and blooming azaleas) may be used to adorn the chancel. Flowers and plants, however, are never placed on the altar itself. All decorations should serve to direct worshipers' attention to the altar, the paschal candle, the font, and the pulpit or reading desk.

The paschal candle in its floor stand is placed near the gospel side of the altar (the left side as one faces the altar). It is lighted for all worship services from Easter Eve through the Day of Pentecost, as a reminder of the unity of these great fifty days of celebration.

The Eucharist should never be excluded from any Easter liturgy, since Easter is the paschal feast. The altar guild will need to prepare for large numbers of communicants, having adequate supplies of bread, wine, and purificators ready for use. (See chap. 7.)

Easter Day occurs between March 22 and April 25. The Easter celebration lasts for fifty days, and it is helpful to have

abundant flowers throughout the season (replacing them with fresh flowers as necessary, of course).

The Ascension of Our Lord

The festival of the Ascension is forty days after Easter, and it celebrates Christ's triumphant ascension from the Mount of Olives to heaven.

White paraments are used, and white flowers are fitting.

The paschal candle may be extinguished at the reading of the gospel on Ascension Day. However, it is better to allow the candle to burn through the Day of Pentecost. Regardless of when it is extinguished, it is moved after that service to its place near the font (where it is lighted only on days when Holy Baptism is celebrated).

The Day of Pentecost

The Day of Pentecost occurs fifty days after Easter. It celebrates the time when the Holy Spirit descended to the believers gathered in Jerusalem. It is, therefore, a day when decorations and ceremonies should be reminders of the Spirit.

Bright red paraments are used on the Day of Pentecost, reminders of the fire of the Spirit. Red gladioli may be used for altar flowers, since their shape suggests tongues of fire. To emphasize the importance of this festival, the chancel may be adorned with red geraniums or other red flowers. They should be arranged to call attention to the altar, although plants and flowers are never placed on the mensa of the altar. Following Pentecost worship services, the geraniums may be planted on the church grounds.

Pentecost is an appropriate day for full and festive processions, and banners may be made in preparation for the procession. Bells may be attached to the banners to add a joyous note to the day. The presiding minister may wear a red cope for the Pentecost procession.

Holy Communion is normally celebrated on this festival, and the altar guild will make the usual preparations. (See chap. 7.)

Since the Day of Pentecost is an appropriate time for Holy Baptism as well as for Affirmation of Baptism (Confirmation), the altar guild should seek advance instructions from the pastor. (See chap. 6 regarding Baptism, and chap. 9 regarding Confirmation preparations.)

The Season after Pentecost

Except for festivals, Sundays after Pentecost use green paraments as a reminder that this is a season of spiritual growth.

The Holy Trinity

This festival occurs on the First Sunday after Pentecost, and it celebrates the doctrine of the Trinity, one God in three persons. Paraments are white.

Reformation Day

Reformation Day occurs on October 31, but it may be observed on the Sunday preceding that date. It is a day for giving thanks for Martin Luther and the other reformers, but it also calls attention to the ongoing need for renewal of the church. Paraments are bright red.

All Saints' Day

This festival commemorates all the baptized people of God who have died in the faith. All Saints' Day is November 1, but it may be observed on the Sunday following that date. The liturgical color is white.

Thanksgiving

Although it is a civil rather than a religious holiday, it has become common for churches to hold worship services on Thanksgiving Eve or Day. The liturgical color is white. Restrained decorations of the fruits of the earth—such as grapes, sheaves of grain, ears or stalks of corn—are appropriate, but should not draw attention away from the altar.

Since the word Eucharist comes from the Greek word for thanksgiving, it is fitting to celebrate Holy Communion at

Thanksgiving. Real bread rather than wafers may be used, as a reminder that God uses the fruits of the earth for God's gracious purposes.

• *Christ the King*

The last Sunday after Pentecost celebrates the kingship of Christ and is so named. The liturgical color is white.

12

Organization

To be effective servants of the liturgy, an altar guild needs to be organized in a way that facilitates its work. Criteria for membership and principles of organization are established by the pastor and the parish worship committee, and are approved by the church council. A sample constitution is included in appendix B of this book.

Membership

An important qualification for all members of the altar guild is a sense of awe in the presence of the Holy God. This awe gives rise to the spirit of reverence that is so essential to the altar guild's work. The ministry of liturgical preparations is a high privilege for a Christian, and dedicated altar guild members will carry out their responsibilities with awe, joy, gratitude, and love for their Lord. Tasks of the altar guild are not a burden but a delight, not a duty but a high privilege. There is no room in the altar guild for complaining or grumbling. If the work cannot be done with joy and a sense of privilege, a replacement should be sought.

Another important characteristic is humility. While it is necessary for altar guild members to be skilled in various ways, each member is only one among many servants of the liturgy. The privilege of serving God is shared with other altar guild

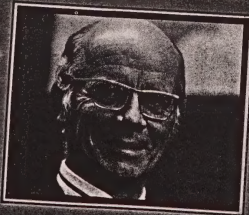
the LORD'S SUPPER

MARTIN E. MARTY

Martin Marty, prominent religious leader, reexamines the meaning behind the Lord's Supper and traces its influence on the lives and experiences of today's Christian. He delves into the attitudes, beliefs, and practices that have grown up around this sacred ritual over the centuries, and retells the story of the Lord's Supper by recreating a day in the life of a contemporary believer who participates in the service.

Personal in tone, this sensitively drawn depiction of the significance and power of God's act of grace in the Lord's Supper becomes both timely and reassuring for modern men and women who follow Christ's command to "do this in remembrance of me."

Martin E. Marty, Associate Editor of *The Christian Century* and author of many books, including *Baptism*, is Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Professor at The Divinity School of The University of Chicago.



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the LORD'S SUPPER

4. Reflections during Communion

The minutes of reflection during Communion do not allow time for developing a well-rounded theology. Indeed, they hardly suffice for sustaining a simple sequence of serious thought. But one can use this time, with or without some hymns or prayers, to place a few little mental levers on a few spiritual fulcrums, in order to lift them at other times, in other places. One might reflect, for example, on the feelings experienced, the forgiveness received, the presence promised, or the commitment entailed.

Experience

What am I supposed to feel? Am I *supposed* to feel? The whole idea of receiving forgiveness of sins implies recognizing how far you are from God and in how much need you stand. But what if you do not *feel* guilty or agonized?

You have to admit that different personality types will react variously. William James talked about "the sick soul" and "the healthy-minded" as psychological models. The sick soul will have no difficulty feeling in need of forgiveness. The trembling of a leaf has made hearts leap in fear from Leviticus to Luther to modern times. The whole universe seems then to be personified. It takes the form of the accusing finger of God. The victim of such sickness may simply be working out some problem left over from a bad childhood. Parents placed too many restrictions on the conscience, and adult life became nothing more than a "Do I dare?" or "Someone is watching!" Such a person hesitates to take bold action, fearing the consequences.

When time for confession comes, such a sick soul is like a junkie let loose in a pharmacy: All the options are there, in dazzling array. If you are a sin-sick soul, as the psalmist was when he made a river of his bed because of tears, you are able to spill out whole catalogs of faults. So you examine the recesses of the heart and there find every kind of ugliness. You have not done anything worse than anyone else, but you feel worse. You know that before God the greatest faults, while they may mess up human relations more than do the sneaky little faults, violate above all the divine image. True, God forgives them as completely as others, but you still feel they demand a heroic assault.

Once upon a time you were taught to load up everything for a bimonthly crusade against sins at Communion. If you were fortunate, your church encouraged private confession. While you could and should always confess your faults against the person you offended, all faults, especially hidden ones, were faults against God. The minister became a representative person who could speak as it were for God. Ministerial words also became symbolic ways of hearing the human race reaffirm you. They personified the congregation. God was gracious, but now the human family was shown to include "gracious others."

If you did not make a private confession, every Communion service included a group opportunity for exposing your sinfulness to God through rite and ceremony. If such confessions stood the risk of turning routine—and you had to admit that the pose of the average congregation suggested that most people were pretty casual about what they were saying and doing—for you, at times at least, they were wonderful instruments for unburdening. You placed your sins on the strong shoulders of Christ, and the minister in the name of God absolved you of, or forgave,

those sins. Somehow you had to work out a logic by which you again brought them to the Lord's Table only minutes later. Since it was "for forgiveness," you were to leave sins there and walk back to the pew refreshed, with a clean slate on which to start piling up a whole new batch of sins.

Seriously, you knew that this script was not how it was supposed to work. Popular piety had things a bit wrong here. When you gathered your thoughts in an adult study class, the accent was different. There you heard a translation of the phrase *simul iustus et peccator*: You are at the same time the just person made just by the act of Christ, and the sinner kept sinful by your humanity and your acts. "At the same time" meant that when God looked at you in Christ, through Christ, because of Christ—which figuratively meant at you in your baptismal robes, identified with Christ, or here at supper with him—God did not see you as a half-safe, half-sinful being. You were not 99 and 44/100% clean and every day in every way getting better and better through positive thinking about the cross. No, God looked at you and saw Christ. Insofar as God made you just through the grace of Christ which you received in faith, you lacked nothing.

"At the same time" also meant that the God who looked at you when you stood apart from Christ saw nothing to like. This God was not impressed by your claim to have met the Lord. A bumper sticker asserting that you were born again or had received the Holy Spirit meant no more spiritually than do the annual rival claims that Notre Dame or Texas or Nebraska are number one in football. In fact, your greatest temptation—not to need God—occurred precisely in your spiritual life. Especially in our time, when *Psychology Today*, Eastern religions, and scores of Christian movements peddle techniques for meditating, you are tempted to buy into one of these mechanisms and put a claim upon God. When competitive Christian

television programs teach you how to praise God better than others, and be more pious than others, there is a danger that you will use your praise and piety to bind God, to take away the freedom of God. You will be saying, "Notice me, Lord!" All the while you are therefore not relying in faith on the gift of Jesus Christ. You are busy parading virtues, and God is saying, "Forget it! Your virtues at their best are not good enough."

The fact that you feel the need to do such parading suggests that you are a sick soul and need a remedy. You have come, then, to the right place. There is no magical transaction called confession/absolution, or confession/Lord's Supper. But in this meal you receive the gifts of Jesus Christ. You did not earn them and you did not earn a place at this banquet, but by baptism you are identified and united with Christ. As in baptism you symbolically came out from under the water, gasping for life because you had been "dead," so literally—in the Christian scheme—you did already die, and rose, with Christ. When you go to the Lord's Supper, then, as you kneel you are not bringing your adding-machine totals of the sins you want forgiven. You are bringing your whole self in need, and with the loaf and the cup you are receiving the forgiveness that assures you that your whole self is full of well-being.

You know, then, what you are supposed to feel.

William James also spoke of the religion of "the healthy-minded." He thought it was especially attractive to those who joined the Christian Science movement, liberal Protestantism, or something that was then called New Thought. Such people believed that there was an essential harmony to the universe, that all they had to do was tap into it. Mortal mind or negative thinking might interrupt the flow, but a person could realize a return to the original harmony. Such a system of faith is at odds

with the Christian drama that proclaims a disruption of that harmony. Humans created and create discord and chaos. They do not hear the purity of the angels on the morning of creation. They do not stir to the trumpets of the messengers of God. They toot their own horns and sing their own praises. Well-being is not a part of a flow. It is a divine gift that interrupts all our natural ways of expecting wholeness.

While healthy-mindedness as a system is beyond the scope of this Lord's Supper, the healthy-minded psychological style is present among Christians. The Bible and Christian history display characters who did not make a river of their beds with tears. Martin Luther may have felt threatened by a thousand devils and by a judging God who was too near, but in your healthy-mindedness you do not. You see no point in pretending. You find nothing especially attractive or Christian in those otherwise blithe people who think they please God by bowing lowest, kneeling longest, and groveling most visibly: "Look, God, I really got good at confessing!"

The healthy-minded or blithe Christian type is a personality that, fully aware of the fallenness of creation, grasps its beauty instead. After the resurrection of Christ, the first signs of a new order, a new creation, are here for affirming. This kind of Christian takes bits of sand and dye, fuses them, and produces stained glass through which you see the sun break on the sanctuary floor with a foretaste of heavenly sparkles. The New Creation Christian takes the disordered sounds of diesel engines, clanging pots, and scuffling feet and reorders them into scales and tones until you hear overtones of the music of the spheres. This Christian walks the hospital corridors aware of death but sings quiet songs because God is also at work healing. Healthy-mindedness is not positive thinking apart from God but a psychological and spiritual bearing

that finds God to be not the Judge but the One who intended and intends concord.

The blithe type lives with spiritual hazards that are as great as those brought by the grovelers. If you find yourself toward the healthy-minded part of the spectrum, you may use the Lord's Supper as a time to become especially alert to these dangers. The silences for self-examination are excellent opportunities for this. You might be riding for a fall. That is, you may be sunny about your faith because you have not yet been tested. No cloud has yet shadowed you. Wait until you find that your child is suffering from a debilitating disease. Let an economic disaster wipe out your assets. Some day someone important to you will find great fault with you and announce a breach. For all the smiles in the world, you cannot backslap your way into a new relation. Then some of the illusions with which you lived will drop.

Healthy-mindedness may imply a faulty spiritual diagnosis. You have heard the familiar statements of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls cheap grace: "I like to commit sins. God likes to forgive them. The world is admirably arranged." Or "I can sin; that's my business. God will forgive; that's the business God is in. We will keep each other busy." These are flippant translations of attitudes that color many easy lives. None of them measures the cost to God of the cross or the cost to humans of discipleship. Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it becomes nothing. But if it dies, it brings forth fruit. No one follows Jesus without taking up a cross and denying the self. Jesus knew what was in humans and searchingly stripped the disciples themselves of their claims upon God—because Jesus loved his disciples and did not want them to rule God out of their lives by their casualness.

In order to be sure that healthy-minded psychological types come to spiritual depth, the preacher in every sermon

will proclaim the law of God. In some contexts, the law of God is God's power that enables one to see what it is that care of the neighbor establishes. But in the present context, the law of God does nothing but accuse. You thought you were doing all right because you did not kill? Jesus says that if you hate, you are a murderer. You thought you were pretty healthy because you stayed married and faithful to one partner and never committed adultery? You all have committed adultery when you merely looked, or even thought, lustfully. Martin Luther liked to say that if you did not feel sinful you should reach inside your clothes and pinch yourself to see if you are still flesh and blood.

What are you supposed to feel? In some epochs and some congregations, preachers and counselors have to cool people off. Don't feel so much, they say; you are so busy enjoying your miseries that you do not even recognize that there is a Physician and that he has cured. But you, if you are healthy-minded, live in a different kind of age and place. Most sermons urge you to probe yourself more deeply. But you can build a wall against God if you start making the relation with God the basis of your own self-esteem; that will not work. The preacher's admonition to self-examination need not force you to change your personality type or your outlook on the New Creation. It only asks you to be serious. You are to see things not through illusion but as they are. The Christian faith calls you to realism about the disharmonious universe in which babies die, the innocent die, and you will die. There is a fundamental lack of fit in the way the world is now put together apart from Christ, and its misfit character will not go away this side of eternity, despite the victory of Christ.

What are you, then, supposed to feel? If not sniveling, woebegone, sub-Christian blues, you are to acquire awareness. You who are called "miserable sinners" may not feel miserable. But—to update an old illustration

from the era of trains—like occupants of an aircraft in which a time bomb is set in the baggage compartment, though you feel fine about your martini and your magazine, you *are* miserable. You are part of the misfit situation. You need rescue. You need help. At the Lord's Table it is not necessary for you to conjure up all kinds of *emotions*; you simply need to be *aware* of need and to realize the forgiveness of sins.

Forgiveness

Some weeks at the Lord's Supper you might wish to set your lever for reflection under another great burden: the concept of forgiveness. That this forgiveness of sins is "for you" is now clear by everything in the event, but what *is* forgiveness? Do we exaggerate its importance?

Jesus made much of it when he chose to forgive a person in need of physical healing, even though that meant offending the religious leaders. Give those leaders credit. They asked, with a proper sense of regard for holy things, "Who can forgive sins but God?" They were not likely to cheapen forgiveness. Paul busied himself with writing letters telling people how the forgiven should learn to live together as Jew and Gentile, male and female, bond and free. But along the way he spent many energies detailing what forgiveness meant for him and his readers. Through Christian history Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux, Martin Luther and John Calvin, and a large company of others saw forgiveness as a central image for the basic movement of a loving God to mortals.

So it is that in the late twentieth century we have inherited something we can call "the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins." Whole church bodies claim it as their possession. It is their badge and banner. With it they make their claim, "We're number one!" They use it to show what all the second bests look like, because the others own

lesser chunks of the doctrine or because they have it all wrong. In the nineteenth century, Americans paraded their Monroe Doctrine. One night a man was tarred and feathered and run out of town. A stranger came upon the miserable victim and asked him what had happened. It seems that there had been a loyalty test and a dispute about this aspect of foreign policy. What had the tarred man said or done wrong? He answered, "I didn't say I don't love the Monroe Doctrine. I do love the Monroe Doctrine. I live by the Monroe Doctrine. I would die for the Monroe Doctrine. I simply said I don't know what it is." We wonder whether the people with the tar pots and baskets of feathers knew.

You are at the Lord's Table, assured that the forgiveness of sins comes "for you." It is easy to think, "I belong to the right club. I can show God the right credentials. I am loyal to my tribe. I love the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. I live by the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. I would die for the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. But I simply do not know what it is." If so, you have difficulty reflecting on it at Holy Communion. You wish to do better.

First of all, remember that a doctrine does not save. God saves. You need not even call it a doctrine, especially in times when many people use that word to suggest that the life has already gone out of a reality. In their minds—and why play into their problems?—a doctrine is a gravestone you place over the bones of something that once lived. It is a boundary you place around something your ancestors found important. A doctrine or a dogma is an attempt by humans to define the indefinable, to step across the boundaries of mystery and speak overconfidently about the secrets of God. In a time when people do not know who they are, they use the idea of a doctrine to set boundaries. In that case, a doctrine is not a witness to their

love of truth but a mark of their sense of mutual suspicion. Since you cannot trust anyone, you have to ask whether they line up on the wrong or right side of a precisely defined doctrine. The fact that doctrines and dogmas have other, better uses is not of much help here. Let other people on other days rescue the concept of doctrine. You are a hungry person needing food, not recipe books. You seek the forgiveness of sins at the Lord's Supper.

Second, since in church you have time for clarity but not research, you might want some day to study the way the forgiveness of sins may be an obsolete badge of distinction for a church body or two. The Spirit of God works surprises these days, and the spread of divine grace is sufficiently broad that what once looked like a unique property or witness of an evangelical church now turns up on many hands. Four centuries ago, reformers of the church looked around and honestly did see some Christians turning God's gift of forgiveness into a human transaction. People were using their energies to impress God. The faithful bought or visited relics, went on pilgrimages, pursued processions, paid for masses, purchased indulgences, and did what they could to buy the favorable attention of God. They were just as often busy piling up merits to impress God, so that God dared not act unfavorably to people who were owed so much for having helped keep the universe on track. No matter how ecumenical one's spirit, those pages of history cannot be obscured. Roman Catholics, heirs of that unreformed Christianity, today point this out in very public scholarship.

Unreformed Christianity underwent reform. You will hear some people who feel called to draw boundaries for God saying that wrong teachings about forgiveness are still on those other churches' books. Maybe it would be nice if church bodies did feel obliged to retrace their steps to all

the old libraries and councils, call new councils, and bring out their erasers. But churches do not work that way. They write with far more vivid new inks over fading pages. Today it is more valuable to listen to evangelical Catholic sermons, where the message of the forgiveness of sins comes through loud and clear. *The Jerusalem Bible*, which Catholic scholars and publishers would like to see in every home, is a highly public document. Its footnoted versions stress the free gifts of the forgiveness of sins in every crucial passage. This is disappointing to some leftover anti-Catholics. What fun is the Lord's Supper, if there are fewer people to be anti- as we enjoy it? But a Christian spirit also impels you to express joy for the spread of grace. This realization, plus common agreement over the meaning of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, has built a sense of holy but not yet constant frustration among many Roman and other catholic Christians. Why do we stay apart at the Lord's Table? Who are we to build fences where the Host does not?

A third focus for reflection is this: You do not need the words *forgiveness of sins* to express the new relationship you have to God in Christ. In some ways, these words can be code words, a metaphor through which Christians can connect with many biblical themes. Through most of the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures that you call the Old Testament, repentance and forgiveness are not the prime statements. Yet the Old Testament is the church's book. God was active among his people. This God was a loving, caring, and, yes, forgiving agent. The Hebrew Scriptures busied themselves with talking about how God was shaping a people and covenanting with them out of steadfast love.

In the Gospels, Jesus is the bearer of forgiveness, but forgiveness is not the only word on his lips. Jesus calls for obedience. He asks for discipleship. Because, for many,

forgiveness symbolizes the basic trajectory of God's movement to humans, they expect to hear about nothing else. Yet Jesus does what the situation demands. When someone is ill, Jesus *may* be abrupt: "Your sins are forgiven!" But just as often he may simply heal the physical illness, and we do not hear about outcomes having to do with forgiveness. His Good Samaritan is someone who pours on oil and wine and foots the bill for the clinic, without—so far as we know—passing out tracts or preaching sermons on forgiveness.

Paul, who had persecuted the church, found it easy to feel agony over guilt. He was tortured by his need for forgiveness. So he became a proclaimer par excellence of that teaching. But, as we already noted, he spent as much time telling the forgiven how to live together, or to have holy lives, as to be forgiven. So you too do not need to have a specific code word or formula in mind when you want to realize the gift of the Lord's Supper.

When your church wrote its older books of worship and teaching, debate over forgiveness was prime. Martin Luther was of the sick-souled type, who projected his struggles from the monastery onto the movement that followed him. In the modern play *Luther* John Osborne has Luther railing against the empty heavens, as if God were remote: "God is dead." The real Luther had the opposite problem. For him the heavens were full and close, and God was too near, too threatening. A holy God might annihilate an unholy human. Divine perfection could not coexist with human imperfections. The monk tried every rule and every discipline, but still each trembling leaf caused him to cower. When, in the writings of Paul, Luther discovered the forgiveness of sins, the monk naturally chose to use it as the basic image of the loving divine movement.

Today, it is often noted, many people have a different problem. They are there with John Osborne's fictional

Luther. Their God is remote. Where Luther asked, "Is God gracious?" they ask, "Is God?" Their doubts may not lead them to verge on simple atheism. Such Christians put their problem in different ways. They will complain about the lack of meaning in their lives. Where once the simplest peasants could endure every kind of setback because God would reward them in heaven, now eternal life has become a very vague concept for them. While once God seemed to be pronouncing a perpetual benediction on their towns, so that all knew their places, now urban life seems plotless. Typical words that people use—perhaps you use—to describe the modern condition in which most of us share are alienation, brokenness, meaninglessness. We seek reconciliation, wholeness, meaning.

Say words like reconciliation, wholeness, and meaning, and you come very close to the center of Christian witness. Jesus Christ reconciles God to humans, and humans to each other. Wholeness virtually serves as a synonym for salvation, for well-being under God. Jesus Christ the risen one brings meaning because he is the first sign of the New Creation, the new order of being. It is hard to see why anyone should feel guilty about using words like these to express the experience of grace in the Lord's Supper. Christ the physician offers the gift of a cure for what ails us. If he and we have varying names for the disease—and thus, in a way, subtly different diseases—we shall welcome marvelously varied remedies. Forgiveness of sins, then, is a blanket term for the whole relationship that Jesus effects and which is "for you" in the Lord's Supper when grasped by faith.

While writing these pages, I had occasion to consult Edmund Schlink's *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* to see what he and they had to say on this subject. Under "Forgiveness" the index said, "see Gospel; Justification; Lord's Supper; Word of God." Under three of those four categories "forgiveness" did not appear at all; the book

treats it as a synonym for gospel and justification! Under "Word of God," there are seven brief references to the subcategory "of forgiveness." One of these citations does suggest synonymy: "forgiveness of sins is the same as justification" in the confessional writings. And Schlink develops a thesis: "The Gospel is the word of forgiveness through which God justifies the sinner for Christ's sake"; indeed, the Gospel, say the confessions, is "the promise of forgiveness of sins and justification because of Christ."

When we introduce the "-ation" words like "justification," it is easy to clutter and confuse the mind of a modern person who wants to experience forgiveness, to realize wholeness, in the event of the Lord's Supper. How are you to think of what the code words suggest? Most important is the idea that you do not bring something with which to impress God. God shatters whatever is in your hand. The law of God accuses and annihilates you. Then God, acting through and because of Christ, creates a new you, a baptized person-in-Christ. That is what it means to be a forgiven person, to experience an act or a motion of divine forgiveness.

You can now see why this forgiveness is the core of Holy Communion. The body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper are the body and blood of Christ on the cross. The cross was for you, and so is the Supper. In the meal the cross is a present-day reality. The risen and ascended Christ is present in this form and at this event. Just as preaching, received in faith, is not mere talk about forgiveness but actually works forgiveness, so the Lord's Supper, received in faith, is not a pageant displaying the story of a forgiving God. It is God in action, effecting forgiveness, creating the new. The Large Catechism uses vivid language about the Lord's Supper not as a prescription but a remedy: "For here in the sacrament you receive from Christ's lips the forgiveness of sins, which contains and conveys God's grace and Spirit with all his

gifts, protection, defense, and power against death and the devil and all evils." Maybe you had not quite counted on having to take on "the devil and all devils," but this remedy is designed to help you do just that. And there may be a better way of conceiving what is wrong than the way of superficial diagnoses about personality types, symptoms of imbalance, Oedipal complexes, or maladjustment to the modern condition. The Lord's Supper is "the food of the soul since it nourishes and strengthens the new person." It is "a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine which aids and quickens in both soul and body. For where the soul is healed, the body has benefited also." Here is another bonus, and you do not have to join a therapeutic club in the church to share the benefit.

Forgiveness means liberation. Classically, this liberation refers to freedom from sin, death, and the devil. But it is possible to hear of this only in the context of middle-class America and not to envision all the other settings in which Christians look for liberation. In the concentration camps the Lord's Supper meant forgiveness of sins, but it also depicted a zone of human freedom into which believers hoped God would lead them again. Under governments that repress the faith, communicants cannot help but include their prayers and hopes for escape from such bondage. Late in the twentieth century in Latin America and elsewhere in what is called the Third World, Christians hungry for political and economic freedom have developed a "liberation theology." In its terms, worshippers want the Lord's Supper to be freed from the cozy bindings in which the rich celebrate it.

To the liberation theologian, many biblical motifs have come to be neglected by churches in prosperous nations. Throughout the Old Testament, the Lord of Israel is especially active among the poor and overrun. Jesus Christ clearly announces that he has also come to the oppressed and wants to work for change in their life. In that thrust,

the death of Jesus and the Lord's Supper are gifts to the poor and oppressed, who, it is said, feel less the weight of sin than they do the bondage produced by humans who exploit them. Such reasoning is understandable among people who know little freedom and have nothing earthly to look forward to under their present regimes. Secure and well-off Christians do well not to judge these brothers and sisters but to understand them when they tie together their dreams of political freedom on the one hand with their grasp of grace and liberation from sin on the other. The two are not the same thing, but freedom is contagious, and acts of imagination can help Christians everywhere share one another's aspirations and hopes that God will act.

Obsession with the code term *forgiveness of sins* has sometimes led partisans to narrow the meanings of the Lord's Table. They feel it wrong to connect eucharist or thanksgiving with the Supper because it may detract from the main theme. Yet the Great Thanksgiving is wholly preoccupied with being thankful to the loving God who not only created the world but also establishes in it a new relation with you. Others see forgiveness as in competition with the idea of communion, which some churches make central. But this is also unnecessarily cramping. Another of the Lutheran confessions connects the two: The same Lord's Supper that forgives is also "a true bond and union of Christians with Christ their head and with one another." We are, through this gift, "incorporated into the body of Christ, which is the church." Because we and others share unmerited forgiveness, we are on the same level at the Lord's Table. We have to be very careful about placing different levels where God does not, and about ruling people away whom Christ includes at his Supper.

Presence

What do we mean by the presence of Christ in this Supper?

I almost wish you had not brought this up. Perhaps if one could compute all the serious reflections that people bring to the Table, this issue of the presence would rank third. Whoever studies the history of dispute over the sacrament or listens to present-day theological debate might conclude that it is the number one issue. Why? It provides grist for intellectual debate and becomes a kind of test for people who like to sharpen their philosophical tools on things sacred. Being a historian of Christianity, I find it hard to look at the record without adding that if there is any feature of the Lord's Supper that brings out the meanest growls from partisan Christians, this is it. While the faithful people have the least difficulty with the theme, and while the New Testament offers almost no light, the subject naturally comes up in the mind of anyone who wants to be neat and inclusive in thought about the Lord's Supper.

To begin at the end, most writers on the subject say that the precise mode of Christ's presence is a mystery. Then they define mystery not as you do in a mystery story, where by the end of the book everything is clear—the butler did it; there is a conclusion, and the mystery ends. In a deeper sense mystery means rather that if you pull away one veil, another will still cover the subject; one could pull back veils for all the years that history gives and still not have exposed the subject to clear view. Emphatically, the presence of Christ is such a mystery. There can be honest and creative addresses to mystery, such as people make when they witness to the character of God, and less valid ones, of the sort one reads when people convince themselves they really have proved the existence of God or philosophically explained away the origin and presence of evil.

The special problem with the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper grows from the fact that the Scriptures are so nearly silent about it. This means that the Lord's Supper

is used to fill in many blanks. Other teachings are like barnacles attached to it, and it gets connected to other doctrines. Of course, it links with one's concept of where the risen and exalted Jesus Christ is, and whether Christ can reveal the fullness of God in earthly and finite forms. We leave those filled-in blanks and connected doctrines for other authors in other books for other days. You have the Lord's Supper on your mind.

Bring up the presence of Christ and you enter the zone where intellectuality has made its greatest mark on practice. In some churches, one gets the impression that to escape unworthiness—Paul's term for the unexamined life at the Lord's Supper—one must have a certain IQ. It would seem to be necessary for communicants to be able to mouth a precise number of memorized catechismal formulas. The church might make exception for the people in homes for the retarded, who are allowed to get by on simple affirmations of faith in Jesus Christ and a desire for the Lord's Table. But beyond them, those who merit access to Communion are those who have the prescriptions down cold. The twentieth-century church is trying to learn how to hold together two ideas: the integrity of understanding the Lord's Supper and the need not to impose barriers that the Pauline and Gospel accounts clearly do not erect. At the very least, one can learn not to attribute a mean spirit and bad faith to other Christians who are at least as concerned as you are to be faithful to the documents and the truth but who come off with a different reading.

You will never find an intellectually satisfying formula for the presence. Write that down and remember it as you read all the books, by people on your side and by others. In the end the honest writers all have to lapse back for a second to the language about mystery, where they began. Some of them succeed at representing accurately their own

church's teaching; they deserve awards from historical societies. Others ingeniously connect their personal philosophy to the teaching; they merit rewards from philosophical societies, though it is hard to picture a single philosopher likely to be impressed. My tone here might verge on the satirical and the antiintellectual. I do not intend that, since I, too, respect and even regard as necessary the idea of "loving God with all the mind" and extending this to the mode of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper. But here is a case where it is necessary to expect only small returns on expensive investments.

The Lord's Supper service has room for some ethereal images like that of the "thrice-holy" that faced Isaiah in the temple. But at the most personal point the sacrament is very physical. Just as God is revealed in the bad grammar of the well-preached word, so now you have to think in rather crass terms about another mode of the presence. The same kind of bread you will eat at home this noon is on this table. The wine here is similar to what you can have at dinner. You pass them through the same mouth. They carry the same germs. One may harden, the other turns sour, like any other bread and wine. People with bad breath and cavities receive them past droopy mustaches or elegantly tinted lips. Keep the crude images in mind, since no other ones will keep to the forefront the offense and the scandal. This food will pass through the body and be digested and excreted through natural processes. Jesus knew all about that when he pointed to bread and said "This—my body!" and when he lifted a cup and gave it with "This—my blood!" (Some scholars think that, where the Greek text uses the much fought-over word *is*, the language Jesus spoke led him simply to designate.)

You move to the Table and are given the gifts with the words "The body of Christ. . . . The blood of Christ," not "the bread of the earth, the wine of the vine." What are

you to think? Christ is somehow present in form as body, not as ghost. Christ is present in the whole church and in this congregation, in the whole event of the Lord's Supper—but also here and now. Christ is not naturally at home in your heart; there is no room for him there. But now more-than-naturally he finds room through your whole body, through faith, which also means because you hear the word promising his coming, and you cling to that promise. The promise means God recognized that in faith you accept the gift of Christ's presence, and God sees you as "one body" with all others who are in Christ, who receive this body and blood. When the minister hands over the bread or the cup, this handing over takes the same trajectory as the whole shape of God's act in Christ: Christ is handed over to evil people and for the sake of life.

One recent pondering, Robert Jenson's *Visible Words*, points to certain problems connected with two main theories about the presence. The first depends on the power of consecration—remember that ministerial sign of the cross above the bread and wine and how you thought *now* they are being changed? This approach set out to show how God, who can do anything, could make two things into one without destroying either. This is not an unintelligent approach, but it is an unnecessary one. The people who made so much of the act of consecrating were not too interested in explaining the presence. They wanted, as you do not, to carve out a role for the priesthood, to give priests a monopoly on something. Nothing worked better for this than to assert the exclusive right of the priest to a consecrating act that made two things one and yet kept them two things. Today Roman Catholicism has moved far from this concept, though it is still busy redefining evangelical priesthood.

Another way to explain the presence is to use spiritual language in order to remove distance. Yes, it says, by faith

we can see that Jesus overleaps distance and is "at the right hand of the Father." Since distances mean nothing in the spiritual realm, that right-hand position extends here to the altar where the bread and wine are. But this approach makes Christ's presence conditional on your ability to imagine him being far and near; the presence is not straightforwardly here. This understanding also seems to shrink from the idea that the divine or the human can ever be embodied. Christians cannot leap out of their bodies to be spiritually with Christ at the right hand of the Father.

A third approach is more radical than these. The body of the risen Christ is not separated from any reality. Christ has risen in the body to be where God is. God is everywhere. If the risen Christ is, according to promise, embodied where this bread and this cup are, the only miracle you need to believe in is Christ's own resurrection. God is present wherever the promises of God are in effect. These promises are embodied. God has a body where these promises connect to the man Christ Jesus, or to this event called the Lord's Supper and the bread and the cup that are at its heart.

This bread and wine are, in the eyes of God, the presence of the man Jesus. No other body and blood of Christ are to be found by means of better telescopes in farther ranges of distance above the clouds. The risen Jesus is risen to new spiritual and bodily life, so we can now be audacious about the promises and say that the bread and the cup *are* the body. But this is true only for faith. The presence is hidden. The bread does not look like his body, and it did not do so when first he made the designation and offered the promise about his embodiment in the meal. There is more to Christ than this local and temporal presence. This "more" has to do with Christ's future when the word will be preached and when the bread and wine will be enjoyed again in this event. That is why after the service today the

ministers—or anyone—can consume the leftover wine and bread. Forget about the elements then. If their power as Christ's body depended upon consecration, you would have to be deconsecrate them or save them for ongoing power. The choice you make shows how you regard this event.

Within our generation it is not likely that all Christians will come to agree on this or on any other version of the presence. Remember my first words in this connection: These efforts could do no more than draw away some veils while leaving others to surround the mystery.

Commitment

You may find it valuable to reflect on still one other feature of the Lord's Supper. What does this event have to do with my way of life?

By concentrating on what passes through your mind during the liturgy, we have sounded rather churchly and even churchy. These reflections might have the smell of incense and the glow of candles about them, and thus they lose contact with the surrounding world. Yet you may spend all but a couple of your 168 weekly hours outside the sanctuary. Debates about catechisms and dogma will almost never come up there. The test of this Lord's Supper and its workings will be in the lives of communicants.

In the oldest words we have about this meal, in First Corinthians, Paul concerned himself with connecting Communion practices with the lives of the participants. Many of them lived in open scandal. That had to stop. Others made a noisy orgy out of the eucharist itself. Paul drew the congregation up short with questions: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16-17). That word *participation* is an urgent link between the

liturgy and Jesus Christ and then between Jesus Christ and all the rest of life. An exchange is going on here; in fact, behind the Greek word translated "participation" stands the word *exchange*. In a sense, Jesus Christ, the son of God and divine Savior, exchanges roles when he takes on flesh, humbles himself, gives himself in this bread and wine, and suffers death. And for that reason you undergo an exchange and get to share in the divine gifts and life.

No one should walk away from the Lord's Supper unchanged. It is good to use the visibility of Communion and its bodily actions as an occasional means to reflect on personal commitment. You may have heard some experts advise that congregations be kept busy singing hymns during Communion so that they will not accidentally glance up and see who else is at the Lord's Table. A good-looking person of one sex may distract an observer of the other. The sight of someone you cannot stand could disturb you. (In which case, why were you not reconciled before this hour? Seeing the person is a reminder of ongoing work for you!) We could turn this around: Seeing and being seen is a very useful exercise, since bodily movement to the Table is an announcement of intentions. Not "Look at me, folks, how pious I am for being here!" The day when attending church gave you status is long past. Instead "Look at me, folks, as I look at you. We are sinners, but we are participants in the body and blood of Jesus Christ. We get to see what prophets and kings wanted to see but could not. We are part of the New Creation. Our bodies are on the line. We are committed."

A congregation is a gathering of people who bear one another's burdens. They are people who can support one another in illness and weakness, encourage one another when a task is heavy, speak a word of serious concern when they detect a lapse, and rejoice together in victories. Bodily presence at the Lord's Supper is not to be shunned

but celebrated. Jesus Christ is here in a bodily presence with the bread. Why should you lower your eyes? Jesus Christ is here also as a bodily presence in you and your fellow members, who are to be Christs to each other. You should not lower your eyes. Look up.

And as you look up, you see that the last communicants are leaving the Table. One or another of these reflections took control of your mind. You have to scoop up a hymnal, a worship folder, and some leftover thoughts, since the service will come rather abruptly to its end.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ASSERTIVENESS, PASSIVITY, AND AGRESSION

PASSIVITY	AGGRESSION	ASSERTIVENESS
<u>Definition:</u> Failing to stand up for oneself, or allowing one's rights to be easily violated.	Standing up for oneself by violating the rights of others.	Exercising personal rights without violating the rights of others.
<u>Attitude:</u> I'm unimportant.	Only my thoughts, feelings, needs are important. You don't count.	This is what I think, need, feel, or believe. (But I respect your right to think or feel differently.)
<u>Characteristics:</u> Dishonest, indirect, apologetic, ineffectual. Closed.	Critical and coercive. Often dishonest, usually inappropriate. Closed to others' communication.	Direct, open, honest, and appropriate.
<u>Goal:</u> To appease others and avoid conflict at all costs.	To dominate or win; to punish or humiliate; to protect oneself by going on the attack.	To get one's needs/wants met. To maintain self-respect and personal power. To give and get respect and fair treatment.
<u>Consequences:</u> Hurt, anxiety, self-contempt. Possibly anger at a later time. The other person may feel guilty or superior, and may experience irritation, pity, or disgust toward the passive person. Passivity blocks trust and intimacy in relationships.	Breeds mistrust and resentment in others. May lead to an escalating cycle of aggression and counter-aggression. Aggressor may feel guilty later on; may experience social isolation as others avoid him/her. Aggressor may become increasingly aggressive.	Risks rejection/disappointment, but often results in satisfaction of needs/wants. Maintains self-respect and trust and mutual respect in relationships.
<u>Verbal Components:</u> Apologetic words. Veiled meanings. Hedging; rambling; disconnected. At a loss for words. Failure to say what you really mean.	Accusations; loaded words. Imperious, superior words. Threats. "You" messages that label, blame, criticize, or degrade. Verbal overkill, not allowing a word in edgewise.	Honest statement of feelings, thoughts, or wants. Direct statements that say what you mean. "I" messages.
<u>General nonverbal:</u> Actions instead of words, hoping someone will guess what one wants. Looking as if one doesn't mean what one says.	Exaggerated show of strength. Flippant, sarcastic style. Air of superiority.	Attentive listening behavior. General assured manner. Facial expression fits emotion being expressed.

PASSIVITY

~~AGGRESSION~~
assertive

~~ASSERTIVENESS~~
aggressive

Specific Nonverbal Components

Voice: Weak, hesitant, soft, sometimes wavering. May be monotone, lack expression.

Eyes: Averted; downcast; teary, pleading.

Stance, posture: Stooped; may lean for support; excessive head nodding. May distance excessively.

Hands: Fidgety, fluttery, clammy.

Firm, warm, well-modulated, relaxed. Speech flows, seems spontaneous.

Eye contact, but not staring.

Well-balanced, erect, straight-on. Relaxed. Appropriate distance, may lean toward other person.

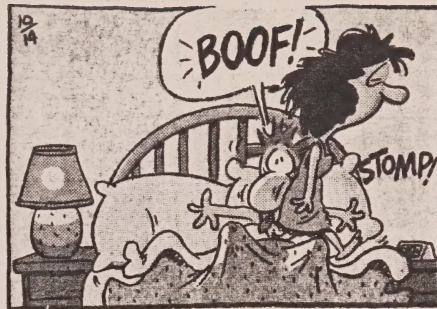
Relaxed, expressive gestures.

Tense, shrill, loud, shaky, cold, "deadly quiet"; authoritarian; demanding, superior.

Narrowed; expressionless; staring; cold; not really seeing you.

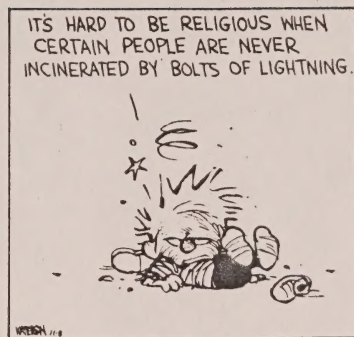
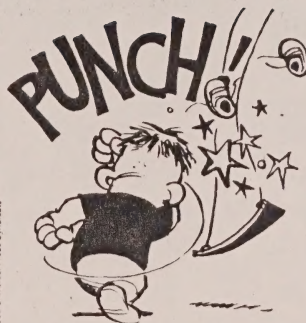
Hands on hips; feet apart. Stiff and rigid; rude, head thrust forward; imperious. May intrude on other's territory, standing too close or hovering over.

Clenched; abrupt gestures; finger-pointing; fist pounding. Actual physical violence (pushing, hitting, grabbing).



The Arnolds feign death until the Wagners, sensing the sudden awkwardness, are compelled to leave.

CALVIN AND HOBBS





may be disturbed. He may feel burdened if he does not speak, but his brethren will have to take his burden back home with them if he does speak. If one person speaks out of order, the whole assembly suffers. Let me state emphatically: the Holy Spirit should not be offended in the meeting. If He is offended, the spiritual blessing will be lost. When we are concerned with others' needs and others' edification, then the Holy Spirit is honored and He will do the work of edification both in us and in others.

Be a humble soul from the very start. If anyone is uncertain whether his speaking edifies or not, it is best for him to consult with the responsible brothers, to ask them, "Brothers, do you think I should speak more or speak less in the meetings?" Be humble and do not think too highly of yourself, as if you were the marvel of these twenty centuries—the best singer and the best preacher! Let us learn humility that our gatherings may be strong. Whenever people walk into our midst, they should instantly sense the presence of God. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. It will cause them to fall down on their faces and worship God, declaring that God is indeed among us.

LESSON SEVENTEEN

VARIOUS MEETINGS

In the previous lesson we stated the principle of meeting together; now we will turn to its practice. From what I personally can see, there are five different types of meetings in the Bible. They are gospel meetings, breaking of bread meetings, prayer meetings, exercise of gifts or fellowship meetings, and ministry or preaching meetings. We can find examples of all these in the Bible. Thus we know that at the time of the apostles in the New Testament days, there were at least these five different types of meetings. The church today also needs to have all these various meetings if it is to be strong before God. We must learn how to meet in order to help brothers and sisters grow in the Lord.

Gospel Meetings

The most important meeting in the New Testament is the gospel meeting. It is the first type of meeting in the book of Acts as well as in the Gospels. Judging from the

history of the early church, gospel meetings were the most basic of all the church meetings.

It was not till after the church began to degenerate during the third and fourth centuries that gospel meetings gradually lost their prominence and ministry meetings took on the leading role. The popularity of listening to sermons is a reflection on the weakened condition of the church. In the early church, preaching the gospel rather than listening to sermons occupied the foremost place. Today's reverse situation is a proof of the failure of the church. To have a strong church, the preaching of the gospel should be restored to its original position of being the most basic of all the meetings.

Brothers and sisters everywhere need to receive light from God and not imitate the ways of traditional Christianity. Christianity generally emphasizes sermons; we have unconsciously followed that practice. May the Lord be gracious to us so that we may be recovered to the original state of the church.

The Lord has put the church on the earth not only for the purpose of building herself up but also for the sake of gathering in souls to be material for the church. The gift of evangelist does not head the list so far as the inward upbuilding of the church is concerned, but when the gospel was preached in Acts, evangelism was the first gift to be exercised. Philip's evangelization of Samaria in Acts 8 is a clear evidence of this. During the time of the expansion of the church of God, the gift of evangelist occupied the first and foremost place. Let us therefore correct the custom of traditional Christianity which makes listening to sermons the center of all gatherings; let us put gospel meetings back again in their proper place.

As soon as people come to believe in the Lord, they should immediately start to help in the preaching of the gospel. Do not allow them to develop the habit of listening to sermons; instead, help them to cultivate the habit of serving by preaching the gospel.

There should be at least one gospel meeting every week. Set aside the best time for this meeting, either the Lord's day morning or the Lord's day afternoon. Arrange for two or three young believers who are somewhat more advanced and gifted to give their testimonies or to preach the gospel. The older ones either can help these younger ones or, upon occasion, preach themselves. Do, however, give the young ones opportunity. There should be no more than three giving testimonies or preaching the gospel lest the meeting become confusing. The best is to have three persons.

1. COME TO COOPERATE

New believers attending the gospel meetings should realize that the message is not for them but for the unbelievers. Therefore, no believer should come with a critical or indifferent or uncooperative attitude. Do not judge in your hearts whether the gospel is preached well or not. Remember, God has not arranged the meeting for you to hear the gospel. Your attitude should be that of desiring that souls may be saved. You come to cooperate, not to criticize.

2. COME AS THE BODY

Encourage all the brothers and sisters to attend the gospel meetings. Never let any brothers and sisters think they do not need to attend because they are already saved.

True, you are saved, but in the gospel meetings you have work to do. Do not come passively, but rather come in order to work. Let no one be careless about the gospel meetings. The question does not lie in whether or not you know the gospel. Indeed, you should know the substance of every meeting. But you come to the gospel meetings so that you can help, thus having a part in it yourself.

3. BRING A FRIEND

One thing we must certainly do is bring people to the gospel meetings. Before the meeting time, we should invite our friends and relatives. We should extend our invitation to them several days in advance. We should not come to the gospel meeting alone but should at least have one person with us. Do not bring more than four with you, for if you bring too many you will not be able to take care of them. Should it be, though, that God gives you grace to bring in ten, twenty, thirty people, what should you do? You should ask for help from other brothers and sisters. However, do not bring in more unbelievers than you can handle.

It is clear, then, that when you attend gospel meetings, you do not just arrive on time. Those who attend the meetings must prepare beforehand by inviting friends. As the time for the meeting draws close, you should bring your friend in or, as Luke says: Go out into the streets and lanes of the city, yes, even to the highways and byways, and compel the people to come in (See Lk. 14:21-23). You do have a responsibility in the preaching of the gospel. You should at least bring in another soul. How can a gospel meeting be held if only believers attend? Make all the arrangements in advance. Tell the people whom you have

invited where you will meet them. It is absolutely necessary that you bring people in.

4. TAKE CARE OF THE FRIEND

There are several things we should do during the meeting to take care of the friends whom we bring.

SIT NEXT TO THE FRIENDS

When an unbeliever comes to the meeting, he has no idea where to sit. It depends entirely upon you. If there are ushers in the meeting, you should ask them where you should seat your friend. You should follow their directions. If you bring in one person, sit next to him; if two people, sit in the middle; if four, put two on each side of you. Do not try to take care of more than four, for this will be an impossibility. If you have more than four to bring, you should prearrange to have some other brothers and sisters take care of them. Seating is quite important in a gospel meeting. Do not fill the hall with unbelievers. Let the believers and the unbelievers sit next to each other.

HELP FIND BIBLE VERSES AND EXPLAIN TERMINOLOGY

After you have been seated, you have quite a few things to do. You should help unbelievers find the Bible verses given by the preacher. Suppose the preacher speaks on Joshua; you must find the place in the Bible for your friend, for he does not know where Joshua is. If the preacher uses a special term without explaining it, then you should softly whisper to your friend the meaning of the term. If he seems puzzled by names of persons and places, you can tell him that these are Bible names. You need to supplement whatever lack there is in the preaching. Do

not speak too loudly, but whisper clearly enough to make him understand. Mr. Paget Wilkes mentioned an incident in one of his books. Once a preacher from England went to Japan to preach the gospel. Many came to hear him. His first sentence was: "You know the story of the exodus of the people of Israel out of Egypt." Mr. Wilkes immediately went to him and said, "These people know nothing of the Israelites nor of Egypt." Such a move was very wise for it would have taken at least an hour to explain who the Israelites were, what Egypt was, and how the Israelites came out of Egypt. The preacher did not know that these people were so ignorant. However, had he continued without an explanation, then those near the unbelievers could simply have whispered, "The Israelites were Jews, Egypt was a nation, and the Israelites were freed from slavery when they came out of Egypt."

FIND THE HYMNS

You should also help the unbelievers to find the hymns. Instruct them especially when a chorus is sung. If you have four friends with you, it will be all you can do to take care of them in this matter.

OBSERVE REACTIONS AND PRAY

Observe carefully the reaction of the unbelievers as they listen. If their reaction is negative, pray that the Lord will soften their hearts. If you feel a particular person is proud, ask the Lord to break down his pride. Whether the church preaches the gospel well or not depends on how the gospel meeting is conducted. Unless the whole body is mobilized and all the brothers and sisters are involved, there is no

way to preach the gospel. You are the one who knows those whom you have brought in. It is you who should observe them and pray: "Lord, move his heart. Lord, give him understanding. Lord, break down his pride that he may hear." Sometimes you may feel it would be good if the one preaching would say certain words. If so, you may pray thus: "Lord, for the sake of a particular need, make the preacher say those words." Often you will find that the preacher comes out with just those words. Thus, through prayer, you take care of your friends.

HELP THE FRIENDS TO ACCEPT THE LORD

The most important part is to help your friend accept the Lord once you find he is evidently moved. Send the word of the Lord into his heart through prayer. Ask the Lord to make him hear, to let His word sink into his heart, and to enlighten him with the word.

When the preacher is ready to draw in the net, you should encourage your friend by saying, "You too are a sinner. I hope you will accept the Lord." If you notice he is wavering between two opinions, give him a push in the right direction. Do not allow Satan to set up an obstacle or to pull him away. You should work as soon as you perceive that he is somewhat moved. Say to him, "Believe and accept the Lord now. Refusal may mean eternal suffering." When you talk to him, your manner should be serious and sober, lest through frivolity and jesting you lose your effectiveness. When the preacher urges people to accept the Lord, you should help. It is a disgrace if we do not take care of the people for whose salvation we are working while at the same time Satan is diligently working for their

perdition. As Satan carefully guards his possessions, so should we attentively watch over those under our care. We must help them to be saved.

Remember a basic principle: save a person by all possible means. D. L. Moody once said that if we wrongly lead a person to the Lord, God will forgive us. Let our eyes be open. Whether by pushing or by pulling, let us bring people to the Lord. Let us not rest until they are saved.

HELP THEM TO SIGN THEIR NAMES

During the closing of the meeting, help them to sign their names. Some people may be afraid to write down their names, asking why they should do so. You can explain to them that it is for the purpose of visitation.

HELP THEM TO PRAY

Your work is not yet finished. Finally, at the time of prayer, you should help them to pray with you or with another brother or sister. You must not leave anything undone.

VISIT THEM WITH ANOTHER CHRISTIAN

When the church sends people to visit those who have signed their names, you should go with them to visit those whom you have contacted. You may have to go not just once, but two or three times until that soul is saved.

In conclusion, gospel meetings should be the first of all the meetings. The whole body of brothers and sisters must understand its significance and participate in the work. This is how the church will grow and become stronger. May God do the work of recovery in our midst. May the gospel meetings be the first of all the meetings as they were

in the New Testament. In this meeting, every brother and sister must actively work; no one should be lax. Let me tell you, if you get all the new believers to start working for the Lord during the first year of their regeneration, you will make it impossible for them to just sit and listen passively to sermons afterward. If you do this, then the church will truly be in a good condition. The gospel meetings will become a workshop for all the brothers and sisters. Whether a person can preach is not the question; the task is for us to save souls. If we all understand what the gospel meeting is, then there will also always be the need for pulpit ministry. That, however, is not the aim; nowhere in the New Testament does God wish us to aim for that. It is the practice of today's Christianity, but not the practice in the Bible.

Breaking of Bread Meetings

The next important meeting is that of the breaking of bread.

I. THE TABLE AND THE SUPPER

According to the Word of God, the meeting for the breaking of bread has two different aspects: one is the Lord's table and the other is the Lord's supper. 1 Corinthians 10 refers to the Lord's table while 1 Corinthians 11 points to the Lord's supper. However, we would like to consider them in reverse order, starting with 1 Corinthians 11. In the Lord's supper, the bread is the Lord's body, alluding to the physical body of the Lord. By partaking of this body which is given for the remission of our sins, we may thus receive life. So the basic thought of the Lord's supper is to remember the Lord. The meaning of the

Lord's supper lies in remembering how the Lord shed His blood in order that our sins might be forgiven.

But 1 Corinthians 10 takes up another aspect. The breaking of bread is called the Lord's table. "Seeing that we, who are many, are one bread" (v. 17). The bread in 1 Corinthians 11 is the physical body of the Lord but in 1 Corinthians 10 it is us. We who are many are one bread. In other words, the Lord's table emphasizes the communion or fellowship of God's children. Chapter 11 stresses remembering the Lord, while chapter 10 stresses the fellowship of the children of God.

Hence, we have two meanings: one is direct, our focus turned heavenward, remembering the Lord; the other focuses on having fellowship with one another, the one bread on the table. We all have part in this bread; we are all people of this one bread. You belong to this bread; so do I. You have accepted the Savior; so have I. Therefore we ought to have fellowship in the Lord. At the breaking of bread, we come before the Lord both to have fellowship with Him and with all His children.

2. TWO SECTIONS—THE LORD'S AND THE FATHER'S

There is something else to be noticed: the meeting for the breaking of bread is divided into two sections. Let us explain.

Since salvation is composed of two aspects, the breaking of bread meeting naturally follows suit. The first aspect of salvation is that I see myself as a sinner condemned to die, but, through the mercy of the Lord who came to the world and died for me, I have my sins forgiven by accepting the blood of the Lord Jesus. Salvation does not stop at this point, though. After being saved and belonging to the

Lord, I am brought by the Lord Jesus to God whom He calls His Father and my Father. The Holy Spirit who dwells in me causes me to call God, "Abba, Father." This is the second aspect of salvation. In other words, salvation consists of two aspects: the first is the Lord's, and the second is the Father's. The first aspect pertains to forgiveness while the second aspect pertains to acceptance. These two aspects should not be confused in salvation. First I receive forgiveness; then I am accepted before God. As a sinner, I must be connected to the Lord before I can be related to God.

Hence the Bible tells us, "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also" (1 John 2:23). Salvation has both the Son's side, the Lord's aspect, and the Father's side, God's aspect. No one can bypass the Son and come to the Father. He must first come to the Son, to the cross, in order to receive forgiveness, for the just has died for the unjust. Then the Son will lead him to the Father. So, it is first forgiveness and afterwards acceptance. We need to be very clear on this point.

Due to these two aspects of salvation, the meeting for the breaking of bread as a remembrance of salvation naturally falls into two sections. Before the breaking of the bread is the section for the Son; after the bread is broken it becomes the section for the Father. The first portion is the Lord's; the second portion is God's.

FIRST COME TO THE LORD

As we come first to the Lord, we realize what great sinners we are, how we are children of rebellion and of wrath, under the judgment of God without any means of saving

ourselves. But, thank God, through the Lord Jesus who shed His blood for the remission of our sins, we may come to Him today to receive His life. So in the first section, all our prayers and hymns and praises should be directed to the Lord. We as sinners first draw nigh to the Lord to have our sins forgiven.

If we go to the temple, the first thing we meet is the altar, not the ark. Later on, we reach the ark, but first we arrive at the altar. Since the altar is a type of the cross, we first of all approach the Lord with thanksgiving and praise.

In the presence of the Lord, we offer our thanks and praise. Indeed, we can do nothing else but thank and praise Him, for before the blood there is no need to ask for anything. It is inappropriate to ask for things at this meeting. We cannot ask the Lord to shed His blood for us; He has already done that. So we need not ask. All we can do is to thank and praise Him. Whether it is in the form of prayer or in the form of a hymn, nonetheless it is thanks and praise. In thanksgiving, we notice the Lord's work; in praising we consider the Lord Himself. We thank Him for what He has done; and we praise Him for what He is.

In the beginning there may be more thanks; gradually, though, thanks will give way to praise. We thank and we praise. What a wonderful work He has done for us, and what a wonderful Savior He is in His person and position. When our thanks and praises reach a peak, the time to break the bread has arrived. The whole assembly is now brought to the Lord.

THEN THE FATHER ACCEPTS US

After the bread is broken, the second section of the meeting begins. The Lord does not desire that we come to

Him and stop there. He wants us to go on to the Father. Is it not wonderful that it is we who accept the Lord, but it is the Father who accepts us? We must be clear on this point. According to the truth of the gospel, we accept the Lord, not the Father. Nowhere in the Bible are we exhorted to receive the Father, for it is always the Son on whom we are called to believe. The Father receives us *after* we have become acceptable in His Son. Our accepting the Son is but half of salvation; the Father's accepting us is the other half. Consequently, after the bread is broken, we should come to the Father. We should begin to praise God the Father.

On the morning of His resurrection, the Lord told Mary, "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God" (John 20:17b). Before His resurrection, He always said, "My Father," but after His death and resurrection, His Father became our Father also. So in the second section of the meeting for the breaking of bread, the Lord leads us to the Father. Brothers and sisters, He who leads us in the meeting is the Holy Spirit, and the leading of the Holy Spirit is not contradictory to the principle of salvation. The Holy Spirit will lead us first to the Son and then to the Father. Let us learn to follow His leading and go to the Father after having broken the bread.

Of the three parables recorded in Luke 15, we meet the shepherd in the first and the Father in the last. First the good shepherd, then the good Father. The good shepherd comes out to seek us, but the good Father waits at home for us to find Him. The good shepherd leaves home, but the good Father stays at home to receive us. In the first part of the worship meeting, we meet the good shepherd; so afterwards we come to approach the Father. For this

reason, all the hymns and prayers in the second part are centered on the Father. We do not follow our own dictates but are so led by the Holy Spirit. I believe if the Holy Spirit has His free way with us, He will undoubtedly lead us in this manner.

THE SON LEADS MANY SONS IN PRAISE

In Hebrews 2 we notice a marvelous thing: the Lord Jesus brings many sons into glory. The Lord Jesus as the first-born Son leads many sons into glory. While He was on earth, He was God's only begotten Son, because He was the only Son God had. But after His death and resurrection, He transformed us into many sons. We do not become sons until after we have met the Lord Jesus. Thus it is that in the second part of the breaking of bread, the meeting takes up the character of the first-born Son leading many sons. "In the midst of the congregation will I sing thy praise" (Heb. 2:12b). This is the time when the first-born Son leads many sons in praise of the Father. How precious it is that not only the many sons may come to the Father but that it is the first-born who leads the many sons to the Father to praise His holy name. Let us learn to rise up high in our spirit.

The throne of God is established on praises. When the church of God starts to praise, she begins to touch the throne. The more we learn to praise, the more we know the throne.

The type of meeting in Hebrews 2 is the best of all meetings. May we begin to learn a little today. One day in heaven we shall meet in a perfect manner. Nevertheless, let us begin to practice what is meant by being led of the first-born Son to sing praise to the Father in the congrega-

tion in these days before we enter into glory. Let me tell you, this is the ultimate of all the church meetings. It is really glorious.

Prayer Meetings

The prayer meeting is also an important meeting. Each kind of meeting has its own particular characteristic. The testimony which God intends us to maintain on earth is to be fulfilled jointly by preaching the gospel, breaking bread, and praying together. Prayer meetings can be both difficult and easy. New believers need to learn about this kind of meeting.

1. WITH ONE ACCORD

A fundamental requirement for brothers and sisters praying together is to be of one accord. The Lord tells us in Matthew 18 that we must agree on earth. Before and on the day of Pentecost, the one hundred and twenty believers prayed with one accord (Acts 4:1-2). Therefore, the first condition of a prayer meeting is to be of one heart and one mind. How can people gather for prayer if each one has his own mind? The word "agree" in Matthew is most weighty. The Lord promises that, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them. . . ." (v. 19). This particular word in Greek is used in music to denote harmony. If a person is playing alone, there is no problem. But if three play together, one the piano, one the violin, and one the flute, should one of them play out of tune, the result is discord. Likewise our prayers should not be out of harmony. If we are able to agree with one another, God will hear what-

ever we ask. What we bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and what we loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. The basic condition is harmony. Therefore let us learn to be harmonious and not to pray each according to his own wish.

2. WITH SPECIFIC REQUESTS

How can we achieve this goal of harmony? I observe that the greatest problem in many prayer meetings lies in too many requests. As long as there are too many subjects for which to pray, it is very difficult to arrive at harmony. We ourselves create disunity by having fifty or sixty prayer items. It becomes an all-inclusive meeting. We do not find such a situation in the Bible. What we do find there is praying for a specific matter. For example, the church prayed for Peter while he was in prison. We too should not pray for many things, but pray rather for one specific matter. It is easy to achieve agreement when there is only one topic. Too many items will make our prayers like a routine.

I believe the prayer meetings in many places require a drastic change. Let each prayer meeting be for just one thing. Perhaps we should pray for the unemployed brothers and sisters or for the sick or for the poor - one of these and nothing else. With one subject we can readily agree.

If there is yet time after we have finished praying for one matter, then we may mention another matter for prayer. We must do the work of prayer before God. The prayer meeting may be divided into two parts, in each part praying for one thing. To pray for two things at the same time makes it difficult for people to be of one accord. Do not therefore carelessly announce two items for prayer

at the commencement. Let the responsible brother announce one thing at a time. I think the greatest need in a prayer meeting is to make the requests simple. The aim of prayer is to accomplish things, to get things done. It is not for social reasons or to please people; thus it cannot include everything.

The power of the specific prayer uttered in Acts 1 and 2 produced Pentecost. As the cross was the work accomplished by the Son of God, so Pentecost was the work accomplished through the prayer of God's children. How was it done? By praying with one accord. Let us, too, pray in that concentrated, not scattered, manner.

Everyone who attends a prayer meeting should come with the preparation of faith. If possible, the brothers and sisters should be told beforehand of the prayer request so that they may have a burden for it. First the sensing of the need, then the burden, and finally the asking.

3. IN REALITY

There is another basic need for the prayers at a prayer meeting, and that is, reality, or genuineness. According to my personal observation (I dare not exaggerate), I have reason to judge that one half of all the words uttered in a prayer meeting are false. The motive of many prayers is not that God may hear, but that man may approve. Whether God answers my prayer is not so important as long as it pleases men. As a consequence, prayers at the prayer meeting become pretentious and empty.

True prayer comes from the desire of the heart, not from the imagination of the mind. It expresses the feeling of the heart, so it arises from a deep longing within. For this reason prayer in the Old Testament was offered to God as in-

cense. All Old Testament incense was made from trees. After the bark was cut, the tree oozed a kind of resin from which incense was manufactured. Hence prayer is not offering anything that might be at hand; it is the presenting of something dug out of the innermost heart. It resembles something that oozes out of wounds. Such prayers are quite different from the easygoing ones that many offer—prayers good to listen to but very ordinary in content. Let us remember well that our prayers are for God to hear, not for pleasing the ears of brothers and sisters.

If the prayers of the prayer meetings lack reality, we frankly cannot expect the church to be strong. For the church to be strong, the prayer meetings must be strong. For the prayer meetings to be strong, all the prayers must be real. We cannot afford to let them be false, for God will never reward falsehood.

Prayer is not preaching, nor is it lecturing. It is asking before God. Therefore, do not use many words as if God were ignorant of the situation and in need of your detailed intelligence reports and arguments!

We pray because we have need; we pray because we have weakness. We come to receive spiritual supply and power. According to our sense of the measure of our need, to that extent do we pray in reality. If we sense no need, our prayer is bound to be unreal.

One of the fundamental causes of feigned prayer is that the one who prays simply cannot forget the other people present. Being always conscious of people, he easily becomes insincere in his prayer. Hence in a prayer meeting, he should remember that though on the one hand his prayer does represent the whole assembly, yet on the other hand he is alone with God, asking truly according to need.

The more definite the need, the more certain the prayer. You may remember the parable used by the Lord Jesus: a friend unexpectedly arrives and you have nothing to serve him. So you go to another friend to ask for bread. The need is very definite: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you," says the Lord Jesus (Matt. 7:7). You dare not be careless when there is a real need. The Lord promises that if you ask, you shall have it.

4. WITH CONCISENESS

Prayer needs to be concise as well as real. Almost all the prayers in the Bible are very concise. The so-called Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6 is quite short. The Lord's own prayer before His departure, recorded in John 17, seems to be long; yet it is much shorter than the prayers of many of God's children today. Even the prayer of the whole church found in Acts 4 is concise. The prayer in Ephesians 1 is a most important prayer, but it can easily be finished in less than five minutes.

Many times the longer the prayers are, the more pretentious and empty they become. Only two sentences are real; the rest are all added. Those two sentences are for God to hear; all the rest are for the ears of brothers and sisters. We should instruct young believers to pray briefly, telling them that if the older ones pray their long prayers, it is all right, but the young ones should not do so. As a matter of fact, long prayers can cause great damage to the church.

Once, when a sister prayed on and on, exhausting the patience of the whole assembly, Moody did a very wise thing by standing up and saying, "While our sister continues her prayer, let us sing a hymn." May none of us

think that we can be careless during prayer meetings. If we really pray with one accord, unbelievers who happen to come in will have to acknowledge that these Christians do have something. Long prayers dissipate strength whereas concise prayers add strength to the meeting.

The writer of the *Notes on the Pentateuch*, C. H. M., spoke well when he said to please not use your prayer to ill-treat God's children. Many may not whip you with whips, but they beat you with prayers. You can hardly remain in your seat. Let God's children pray truly and concisely.

5. WITHIN THE LIMITS OF YOUR PRIVATE PRAYERS

In corporate prayers, another basic principle to practice is to never let your public prayers exceed your private prayers. This is a good rule. As you pray in private, so pray in public. Of course, you may have to adjust your prayers to suit the public, for you cannot pray in public exactly the same way as you pray in private. This is understandable. But still, your prayers in public should not exceed your prayers in private. As a matter of fact, very few private prayers are false even though equally few public prayers are true. When you come to pray with others, you tend to say what you would not say while alone. Thus you add words to your prayers.

Though public prayer is difficult and tends to be false and long and men-pleasing, yet prayers in the prayer meetings are stronger than private prayers so far as accomplishing things is concerned. God can answer the prayers of the church far more than He can answer personal prayers. The problem today, though, is that there are more answers to personal prayers than to corporate prayers. Why is it so? Because there is so much falsehood, confusion, vain

words in corporate prayers. How God would delight to answer the prayers of His children if they prayed together with simplicity and with one accord!

Exercise of Gifts Meetings

The gifts found in each local church are different. To some local churches, God may give words of revelation as well as gifts of prophecy and of teaching; to others, He may add the gift of tongues and the gift of interpreting tongues. In some places, He may give only the gift of teaching without giving any miraculous gifts; or it could be just the opposite, there being miraculous gifts without the gift of the word. We cannot dictate what God will do in His church. But what we do know is the principle of such meetings: God wishes His children to exercise their gifts. It is evident that we cannot exercise the gifts which we do not have but that we can use the gifts we do possess. Hence, no local church can imitate other local churches in this matter of exercising gifts. Each church must exercise before God whatever gifts the local brothers and sisters have. What we are describing here are meetings according to the principle of 1 Corinthians 14.

At such meetings for the exercise of gifts there may even be questions asked, for we seek to build up one another by finding light from God. So the apostle says, "When ye come together, each one hath a psalm, hath a teaching, hath a revelation, hath a tongue, hath an interpretation" (1 Cor. 14:26). If there is prophecy, let it be at the most three.

In such meetings, if there is no interpretation, let there be no speaking in tongues. Speaking in tongues is for per-

sonal edification, while tongues with interpretation is equivalent to prophesying. Tongues without interpretation does not edify the church because it has no effect on the understanding. For this reason, Paul forbids speaking in tongues in the meeting unless there is interpretation. He does not prohibit speaking in tongues, only speaking in tongues without interpretation in the meeting.

I. DO NOT BE PASSIVE

In this kind of meeting, all brothers who have the gift of the word should learn not to be passive. Often in these gift-exercising or so-called fellowship meetings, the brothers who are gifted to be ministers of God's Word assume a passive position, standing aside and letting other brothers speak. This is not right.

One thing new believers ought to know: not everyone may speak in the meetings for the exercising of gifts. Only those who have gifts may speak. We do not approve of a one-man ministry, neither do we sponsor an every-man ministry. God judges both the one-man ministry and the every-man ministry as wrong. Only the gifted should supply the word; not everyone can speak. Where does the difficulty lie today? The problem is that brothers with ministry adopt an attitude that the meeting is open to every brother, whereas in actuality it is open only to those brothers gifted in ministry, not to every brother and sister. They who are mouths refuse to speak while expecting the hands, the feet, and the ears to speak! What can you expect in such a meeting but confusion? Therefore, all the brothers who are gifted should open their mouths in the meeting. As to the rest, let them speak only when they have something of value to say.

2. DISCOVER NEW GIFTS

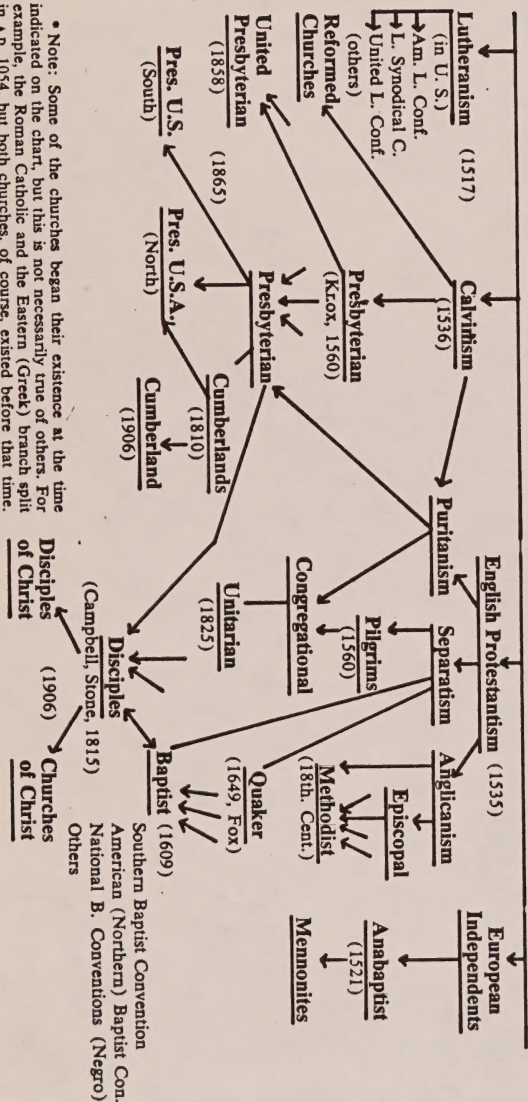
When new believers come to this meeting, they find it rather hard for they do not know what their gifts are. Since they are so young in the faith, they cannot be considered as being ministers of the word. How, then, are they to be helped? My hope is that the more advanced brothers will give these young brothers opportunity to speak. Do not seal their mouths, but advise them to speak simply and briefly at first so as to test out whether God has given them the ministry of the word. Give them opportunity, but not too much. Do not seal any gift and likewise do not spoil any meeting. If some are gifted, encourage them to speak longer next time. Some may have to be asked to speak more briefly later on. Constrain the gifted to proceed further; restrain the less gifted to cut the time shorter. Thus shall the meeting gather strength, and none of the mouths of the brothers will be sealed.

In serving the Lord, we must not only help people in every local assembly to know the Lord but also to discover new gifts. How can we find these gifts? It is in the meeting for the exercise of gifts. During such a meeting, we should have our eyes wide open. Encourage those on whom the Lord has laid His hand. Some like to speak, yet have neither the gift nor the ministry of the word. It is not necessary to forbid them to speak; simply ask them to speak less. Thus shall the young believers be helped as well as be given a chance to help others.

Ministry Meetings

This is the least important of all meetings; still it is a

* Note: Some of the churches began their existence at the time indicated on the chart, but this is not necessarily true of others. For example, the Roman Catholic and the Eastern (Greek) branch split in A.D. 1054, but both churches, of course, existed before that time. Likewise the Anglican Church (Church of England) did not originate in A.D. 1535, but it was in that year that it pulled out from the authority of Rome.



3. Chart: Genealogy of Major Judeo-Christian Bodies in the United States *
By ROBERT WINSTON CAMDEN, Professor, Schreiner Institute, Kerrville, Texas

Doctrines and Beliefs

1. What Catholics, Jews, and Protestants Believe: A Comparison Chart *

By STANLEY I. STUBER

Reprinted by permission from the February, 1954, issue of the *International Journal of Religious Education*. Reprints of this chart are available from the National Council of Churches, 79 E. Adams Street, Chicago 3, Illinois.

GOD

Protestants

God is one; manifested as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Protestants believe in a much more individual and direct approach to God than do Roman Catholics. More stress is placed on the love of God, as revealed in Christ, than in a God of law and justice.

Roman Catholics

Supreme Being, infinitely perfect, who made all things and keeps them in existence. God is the only one God, but has three divine Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Revealed through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who teaches through the Catholic Church.

Jews

One God, personal and universal, whose ways are beyond understanding, yet whose reality gives purpose to man and to the world. No one can serve as an intermediary between God and man.

Roman Catholics

Christ is God made man. Born of the Virgin Mary, incarnation of God, atonement for sin, bodily resurrection. Second Person of Trinity. Both man and God. Salvation through his sacrifice on the Cross, manifested in the Mass.

Jews

Many accept Jesus as a child of God, as a Jew, and as a prophet or inspired teacher, with no supernatural powers. They do not accept the Divinity and Atonement of Christ.

ONE TRUE RELIGION

Protestants

Protestantism has never claimed to be the one and only true religion; but that Christ is the only true way to salvation—not the Church. Recognize Roman Catholics and members of the Eastern Orthodox churches as Christians. Desire the same recognition from others.

Roman Catholics

"We know that the Catholic Church is the one true Church established by Christ because it alone has the marks of the true Church." (One, holy, universal, apostolic.) "We know that no other church but the Catholic Church is the true Church of Christ because no other church has these four marks." (*Catechism of Christian Doctrine*)

CHRIST

Protestants

Accept Christ as divine Son of God. Believe in direct, personal relationship, rather than through Church institutionalism, including Virgin Mary. He is elder brother, moral leader, as well as Messiah and Savior.

* The statements listed here are drawn by the author from authentic sources within the faiths concerned, and represent the analysis of each faith by authorities within that faith, not the opinion of one about the others.

MARTIN LUTHER is well known as the initiator of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Another reformer of the same period was Ulrich Zwingli. These two men met early in that century at Marburg and had a terrible argument over the Lord's Supper, an argument which split the German and Swiss churches in such a way and with such finality that the breach has not yet been healed. What they were arguing about was the manner of the Lord's presence in the Lord's Supper. Luther argued for the literal interpretation of the words "This is my body . . . this is my blood." He held that the word "is" in some fashion meant a kind of equation. The Roman Catholics had maintained that in the miracle of the Mass the bread and the wine miraculously become the very body and blood of Christ. Luther thought this led to idolatry but he still wanted to give the proper weight to the word "is" (probably to protect

the literal authority of the Scriptures at that point) and so he insisted that at the communion the body and blood of Christ are "in, around, and under" the elements of bread and wine so that when one partakes of the elements he really at the same time literally takes Christ's body and blood. Zwingli did not meet this argument straight on but insisted that the important words in the institution of the supper are, "This do in remembrance of me." He made out of the supper simply a memorial feast. The key word for him was "remembrance."

John Calvin's approach was to insist that the communion is remembrance but more than remembrance, and that there is the real presence of our Lord at communion, but not a physical presence. Christ is *really* present but not in any physical sense, and that real, spiritual presence is available to the believer in his response in faith. What has to happen at the Lord's Supper is a communion between the believer and his Lord, for the believer's blessing and nurture, and this is possible according to our Lord's promise and according to our faith. Believer and Lord meet and commune and one does indeed gain sustenance from "the broken body and shed blood" of the Saviour. This view is not to minimize the mystery of the miracle of what takes place, for as Calvin says, "No person may measure the sublimity of the subject." Or again, "Nothing remains, therefore, but to break forth in admiration of that mystery, which his mind is as unable to understand as

his tongue to express." It is not necessary, therefore, to think of the miracle as something less than the Roman Catholics maintain but to understand the nature of the miracle that takes place.

Bringing to mind what has been said thus far in this volume the move has been from Old Testament beginnings to the Gethsemane experience, to the cross, to the disciples' road. Now the question is, how all this which has been done, in some sense still is being done, being experienced week after week in churches all across the world as Christians meet around the Lord's table in obedience to His command, "This do in remembrance of me," how is the observance of the death of Christ in the first century the means by which Christians participate in His body and blood in this century? How are all the benefits of our Lord's cup the nourishment of the present moment? How does a Christian grow and become strong now by "eating and drinking" His body and blood?

To get at this one must understand several things. The understanding is not easy and requires thought and meditation. What is suggested here is very brief and should serve only as a series of guidelines for anyone who faces his holy faith seriously, for all this has been the substance of theological thought for the whole history of the church.

One must first think about eternity and time. God dwells in all eternity, in the eternal now, and we human beings move step by step through our moments in time. How this can be is a question for the philosophers, but

we do know from the Scriptures that the death of Christ which occurred in time, in a certain place, and among men, was an expression of the eternal fact that the Lamb had been slain "from the foundation of the world." And when we come to the Book of Revelation we discover that the victory of God through Christ over the forces of Satan is already accomplished. We speak correctly about the "finished work" of Christ. There is, for example, something called "humanity" and as we come along in time, one by one, we take on this thing called "humanity" during our sojourn on earth. So with Christ and all His benefits. What happened on the cross happens now and when we drink the cup we are participating in Christ's cup in the garden and on the cross. The writer to the Hebrews describes our Lord as "Jesus Christ, the same, yesterday, today and forever." This is not just a description of Christ's everlastingness but assures us that Christ in the believer's heart is the same now as He was for the first believers. Thus when Paul says "It is no longer I that live but Christ liveth in me," or again, "For me to live is Christ," he not only is describing his own experience but the experience of every believer since. When we come to the table of our Lord we are participating in the "eternal now" not only of the universal Christ but the eternal cosmic Christ. What Christ did He does; it is Christ in us—now!—"the hope of glory." It is not only possible but necessary therefore to understand that the Lord is with the be-

lievers at the Lord's table now as He was in the upper room.

We must also understand the nature of symbolism if we are to grasp the reality of what takes place when we drink the cup. Symbols are much more than just an easy representation, one thing standing for another. A true symbol not only illustrates something else but must also convey something else. The church fathers have talked about the symbolism in the Lord's Supper by describing the elements, the bread and the cup, as "physical signs of spiritual realities," or "external signs of interior realities." What they are saying is that when one gets hold of the physical signs, these signs convey or communicate realities as well as outward forms. An American flag is made up of a certain amount of goods on which a certain monetary value is placed. There is a sense in which one can say that the flag is "only" so much material. Why then do we stand at attention, or doff our hats, or hold our hands over our hearts in the presence of the passing flag? Why would we react violently to someone who would violate the flag? The answer is simple: the physical sign not only stands for but also carries and contains a great unseen, spiritual reality. One reads a map and says, "This is Route 128, and this is the turnpike, and this is the freeway," but no one drives his car on the roads on the map. As C. S. Lewis has pointed out, we cannot take the trip without the map but one never confuses the map with the trip. One sees

tears on the face of a child. "There is sadness," we say. But where is the sadness? Not in the tears surely. But when we see the physical sign, the tears, we know that the sadness is there. This is true symbolism: when the physical sign is there we know that the invisible reality is there.

Thus in the Lord's Supper the cup of blessing does indeed carry the blessing. The bread stands for the broken body, the cup stands for the shed blood, but in communion the broken body and shed blood are "really" not "physically" present. The signs communicate the reality. Christ is truly present. This is why "remembrance" is not enough. There has to be a happening and one must "discern" the Lord's body as Paul warns. That a person has to mature spiritually and grow in this experience is surely evident on the face of it. A child can tear up a flag with impunity, but an adult cannot; one who has suffered for the flag experiences greater reality than one who has kept the whole experience at arm's length. Again, one must discipline himself to meditate on these things.

The question is often raised why one needs the elements of the Lord's Supper when Christ is always present with the believer. We need to remind ourselves that we are physical beings and need physical things as channels of meaning and reality. Although "spiritual things are spiritually discerned" the discernment is mediated by physical things. To stop at the sign is idolatry; we worship the creature rather than the Creator. The

heavens declare the glory of God but we worship not the heavens but the God who is declared by the heavens. There are "visible words" as well as spoken words and whereas the good news of the gospel is spoken to us and our lives are changed, it is also true that the gospel is set before us visibly in the sacrament and on this too we feed. We need the signs, not because Christ is not always present with us, but to "bring to remembrance," to bring into focus, to intensify. It is not an experience different in kind but different in thrust. We are surrounded by the sunlight, but a curved glass can bring that sunlight to bear on a direct point in time and place, and at that point, there is enough intensity to bring a piece of paper into flame. Something lights up, comes alive in a new way. So with the Supper. We need feast days, fast days, anniversaries, gifts, acts of love, and our Father knows that we need the signs of the bread and the cup to bring to remembrance, to bring into sharp focus and experience, what we have sensed in general in the presence of Christ in our lives. A girl does not wear an engagement ring to tell her that a man loves her, but when she really looks at the ring from time to time, the great reality of his love comes flooding in and she is assured and renewed. The finished work of Calvary is *experienced* afresh and decisively at the Lord's Supper, in the act of remembrance.

This is the nature, therefore, of "remembrance." A very appealing story which is also instructive, concerns a young man who was called into military service. His

father was deeply concerned and wanted to do what he could. He would have replaced his boy if it had been at all possible. He would have gone with him and protected him from danger if that had been at all possible. But there was really nothing he could do. The boy was being taken away from him entirely, into unknown places and into great danger. He offered the young man a blank check to cover any possible contingency and assured the young man that he could call anytime and the father would "cover" whatever his need might be. The young man could see nothing worthwhile in all this, although he appreciated what his father was trying to do. Finally the father asked him, "What can I do, what can I give you?" The boy replied, "Please give me your pocketknife." Why that? Because the father had a characteristic habit of taking out his pocket-knife and turning it over and over in his hand while thinking or talking. The little habit was part of him. So the boy took the knife. In times of loneliness or fear, and especially in times of temptation, he took out the knife, turned it over in his hand as he had seen his father doing, and as he held onto this physical sign there was brought to vivid remembrance all that his father stood for, all his home and family meant to him, and for brief moments he communed with his father and his family. The sign was not just a memory of something else but a means by which that something else came and lodged in his mind and heart.

On the night in which Jesus was betrayed He told His disciples, as they looked at the bread and the wine and tried to understand what was transpiring in the life of their beloved leader, "This do in remembrance of me." In obedience to that command men everywhere have had their feast of remembrance and communed with their Lord. The tragic event on Calvary's hill was of eternal and cosmic significance as eternity broke into time in the final act of redemption. And that break into time is still the Christ-event at the Lord's table. Those who gather in obedience, who discern the Lord's body in the visible word, who take symbolically what communicates the great reality, have that remembrance which communicates His broken body and shed blood and all the blessings of nurture and renewal and redemption which the crucified Lord has for His children who believe.

